DOROTHY DIXON AND THE MYSTERY PLANE

by DOROTHY WAYNE

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DOROTHY DIXON AND THE MYSTERY PLANE

THE DOROTHY DIXON AIR MYSTERY SERIES

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and the Mystery Plane

BY

Dorothy Wayne

Author of

Dorothy Dixon Solves the Conway Case
Dorothy Dixon and the Double Cousin
Dorothy Dixon Wins Her Wings

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TO

WINKIE

who has had a finger in each
of her Mummy's books

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DOROTHY DIXON
AND
THE MYSTERY PLANE

Dorothy Dixon and the Mystery Plane

Chapter I

AT THE BEACH CLUB

"Here he comes again, Dot!"

Terry Walters balanced on the edge of the beach club float and pointed upward toward the approaching airplane.

Dorothy Dixon bobbed up beside the raft, blew the water from her nose and reached a long tanned arm for the young man's ankle.

"Here *you* come into the drink, you mean!" she gurgled.

Terry yelped, lost balance, and recovering desperately, dived over her head. His departure rocked the float, so that Phil Stanton's lanky figure poised on the diving board, lurched and fell awkwardly into the water.

Betty Mayo, hugging her damp knees on the middle of the float, shrieked her approval of this double exploit.

"Swell work, Dorothy!" she laughed as that young lady pulled herself aboard. "You'll catch it in a minute though!"

Dorothy stood up. Her scarlet bathing cap flamed against the ash blue sky and her wet suit clung to her slender form like a sheath of black lacquer.

"Maybe!" Then, in quite a different tone: "Goodness, Betty, he's missing!"

Betty sprang to her feet. "You're crazy—" she retorted as she caught sight of Phil and Terry knifing their way back to the float. "Why'd you try to scare me? Those boys are all right."

But Dorothy was staring skyward.

"Not the boys! I mean the plane, Betty. Over there beyond the club house. His engine's missing. Bet you an ice cream cone he'll have to land!"

"No, you won't," Betty flashed back. "I don't know a thing about airplanes, and I'll take your word for it. Ooh, Dorothy—do you think he'll hit the roof?"

"Oh, he's all right—"

"Yes, he's over the roof now—but *look!*" Betty's voice rose to a shriek. "He's aim-

ing the plane straight for us—it'll hit this float—"

The last word was no more than a gurgle. Betty had dived overside.

Dorothy did not trouble to turn her head. With her bare feet firmly planted on the timbers, her straight body balanced easily to the float's gentle rocking, she gazed interestedly at the big amphibian sweeping down toward her.

On came the plane, losing altitude with every split second, and sailed over her head a bare thirty feet above the water. Then as she faced about to watch it land, the tail of her eye caught sight of Terry hauling himself over the edge of the float.

"Get you for that last one!" he cried, and scrambled to his feet. "'Who laughs last,' you know!"

"I know—" mocked Dorothy, evading his grasp and running up the springboard. She dived and her body entered the water with scarcely a sound.

As she rose she turned lazily on her back.

"Come and get me!" she tantalized.

Then as she saw him start in pursuit, she rolled over and headed out toward the seaplane which now floated two or three hundred yards away toward the mouth of the inlet and Long Island Sound.

Terry knew the speed developed by her flagrantly perfect crawl, and did not attempt to follow her. He chuckled as he watched the bob of scarlet and the flash of a brown arm that was all he could see of Dorothy.

"Hey, where's Dorothy?" called Betty as she and Phil clambered on to the raft.

"Halfway to Boston, I guess. Race you to the beach for the cones!"

All three cut the rumpled surface of the water with a single splash.

Dorothy's interest in the airplane that had just landed was twofold. Since qualifying for her private pilot's license earlier in the summer, she had met most of the owners of planes living in or near New Canaan. To the best of her knowledge the Loening Amphibian which her father had given her for rounding up the Martinelli gang was the only one of that model pri-

vately owned in that part of Connecticut. That the plane lying just ahead on the water was a duplicate of her own meant that the owner was not a local person.

Dorothy was a keen aviatrix and proud of her airbus. She wanted to compare notes with the owner of this amphibian. She was also curious to learn where the plane came from; and why every day for the past few weeks it had appeared over the Club at about this same time of an afternoon. At five-thirty sharp the crowd of young people on the beach would see it, a speck in the north, coming from over the ridge country back of the Sound. Flying at an altitude of not more than five hundred feet, it would swing over the beach club and cross the Sound, to disappear in the ether toward the dim line of the Long Island shore.

Terry jokingly termed it the Mystery Plane. He told Dorothy that its owner made these daily flights in order to show her how a plane should be managed in the air. She usually returned his good-natured teasing with interest, but each

time she saw the amphibian, her curiosity increased.

As she swam nearer it was plain that this airship was actually the same stock model as her own. With the retractible landing wheels drawn up, the spoon-shaped hull of the biplane, with its two open cockpits aft of the inverted engine, floated easily on the water. The aviator, she saw, was busily engaged in going over his engine.

Dorothy stopped swimming when she was a few yards from the amphibian.

"Hello, there!" she called, treading water. "Need any help?"

The man looked up from his work, evidently perceiving her for the first time. Dorothy was surprised to see that the face below the soft helmet and goggles was bearded to the eyes.

"No, thank you," he answered and went on tinkering with the motor. The words, although courteous enough, were spoken in a tone that showed plainly that he wished to end the conversation then and there.

Dorothy was persistent and not easily discouraged.

"Located the trouble?" she asked.

"Not yet," replied the man without lifting his head.

"Looks like loose manifold, or gas connection, to me."

There was no reply to this helpful suggestion.

She began swimming toward the plane again.

"Mind if I come aboard?" she called.

The bearded aviator straightened his back and faced her again, his right hand grasping a monkey-wrench.

"No. I do not wish it," he flared. "Why for do you bother me? Keep off, I tell you."

For the first time, the girl in the water noticed his strong foreign accent.

"Aren't you polite!" she mocked. "I don't suppose you'll mind if I come alongside and rest a moment?"

"You stay where you are, young woman." As the man's anger grew, his accent became stronger. "I haf no time to bodder wid you. Go away—and stop away!"

"But I just want—"

"I don't care *what* you want. Come alongside, and I'll use this wrench on you!"

"Oh, no you won't!"

Terry Walters slipped round the engine and tripped up the aviator. Before that irate person knew what was happening he found himself flat on his back with a hundred and sixty pounds of young American kneeling on his chest, menacing him with his own monkey-wrench.

"That's not a nice way to talk to a lady!" Terry remarked dispassionately eyeing his victim. "Ask her pardon like a good little boy. Do it quickly, my friend, or I'll plant this wrench in the middle of that bush you call a face!"

"I didn't mean nossing," the man grunted.

"Try again!" Terry whacked his captive's shin with the wrench. "Also try to cut the double negatives. Our English teacher says they're bad form and—"

Terry's banter stopped with a yelp of pain as the man's head jerked upward and

his teeth snapped on the hand which held the wrench.

Dorothy, who had swum to within a few feet of the amphibian, saw Terry thrown to one side. Like cats, the boy and the man seemed to land on their feet—but now it was the strange aviator who held the monkey-wrench.

"Look out, Terry!" shrieked the girl as she saw the man's arm swing upward.

The small deck forward of the lower wing section was far too narrow to permit dodging. Terry did the only thing possible under the circumstances to save himself. Three seasons on the football team of the New Canaan High had made that young man a quick thinker. He dove below the swinging blow and tackled the aviator just above his knees. It was a well aimed tackle and the two went hurtling overside to disappear with a splash.

Terry's blond head was the first to appear. Then as the aviator's came popping up, facing the other way, young Walters seized him by the shoulders and sent him under once more.

"Let the man alone, Terry!" commanded Dorothy. "Can't you see he's swallowed half the Sound?"

"But he'd have brained me with that wrench, Dot—"

"I'll 'Dot' you if you take liberties with my first name!" Miss Dixon shook her fist above her head. "Anyway, it's my fault. I butted in. That man and his plane are none of our business."

They were swimming back toward the float now and a glance over her shoulder told Dorothy that their late antagonist was pulling himself aboard the amphibian.

Terry saw him too, and waved a hand. But the foreigner, occupied in wringing water out of his clothes, disregarded them.

"I've had enough of the water for one day," declared Dorothy between strokes. "How's the wrist? You might have been badly hurt, Terry."

Terry motioned toward the float. "But I wasn't, old thing," he chuckled. "Come over to the raft a moment, before we go ashore. I've got something I want to show you."

"Make it snappy, then," she rejoined. "You and I have got to be at Silvermine by seven-thirty, you know. Curtain up at eight-thirty—and you remember what Mr. Watkins said about any of the cast being late?"

Terry swung himself up on the decking and gave a hand to Dorothy.

"I'm only a chorus man," he grinned. "We'll both get to the Sillies in time. Look at this—"

He opened his hand and held it out, palm upward.

"I'm not interested in seaweed!" Dorothy's tone was full of disgust.

"Seaweed, nothing! That's a piece of your friend's beard!"

"You don't mean to tell me you pulled it out?"

"Not out, dearie—off. That wasn't his own hair that lad was wearing."

"A *false beard?*"

"What else?"

Dorothy pursed her lips. "Well, that amphibian and its pilot are two of the most mysterious things I've ever run into."

"I wonder what he is up to, Dot—I mean, Dorothy?"

"I wonder, too. By the way, how did you happen out there—and just at the right minute? I thought I saw you start a race for the beach with Betty and Phil?"

Terry nodded his wet head and laughed. "That was only a bluff to make you think I wasn't coming after you. As I saw you were having an argument with him, and I didn't like the way he was acting, I swam around the tail of his plane and got aboard on the farther deck—and—well, you know the rest. Why did you want to go aboard?"

"Curiosity, pure and simple. Have you any idea why he flies over the Club nearly every afternoon, and always at the same time?"

"No—have you?"

"Not the dimmest. But now that I know friend pilot wears false whiskers, I'm certainly intrigued."

"Come again," frowned Terry. "I didn't get that last one. Did you say *intrigued?*"

"Cut the clowning. This is serious, Terry. That fellow is up to some mis-

chief, or he wouldn't disguise himself."

Behind them the amphibian's engine sputtered, then roared.

"I've got an idea," said Terry as the two watched the plane taxi out toward the take-off. "Why don't you get your bus and follow that bird some afternoon?"

"I'd already decided to do it tomorrow. Want to come?"

"You bet! How do you expect to work it?"

"Look here, if we're going to make that show on time, we'd better go right now. We'll make our plans later. Come along."

Their bodies cut the water with hardly a splash as they raced for the beach. Out in the inlet the amphibian rose gracefully into the air and headed into the mist which was creeping up Long Island Sound.

Chapter II

THE THREE RED LAMPS

In the wooded valley of the Silvermine, some three miles from the village of New Canaan, lies the famous artists' colony which bears the name of that rippling little river. In the midst of this interesting community, the artists have built their Guild House, where exhibitions of paintings and sculpture are held. And here it is that once a year they give that delightful entertainment known as the Silvermine Sillies.

The casts of the Sillies invariably comprise the pick of local talent from the two communities. Dorothy had starred in the musical show given by the New Canaan High School the previous winter. She had a lovely voice and a natural talent for acting. She loved amateur theatricals. But that she should have been assigned a part in the Sillies while yet in High School was a compliment beyond her expecta-

tions. She had worked hard at rehearsals and under an assumed calm was wildly excited on this, the opening night of the show.

She left Terry on the beach, after cautioning that young man again not to be late, and ran up the shingle to the Dixon's cabana, which, together with its gaily painted counterparts, flanked the long club house at the top of the beach.

A surprisingly few minutes later, Dorothy reappeared, her bathing suit having been discarded for an attractive linen sports frock, and jumped into her car.

The distance between Tokeneke on Long Island Sound and New Canaan back in the hills of the Ridge Country is slightly under eight miles. Luckily, on her drive home, Dorothy encountered no traffic policemen. Notwithstanding summer traffic and the narrow, winding roads, she pulled into the Dixon garage on the ridge a mile beyond the village, a bare ten minutes later.

Another change of costume and she ran downstairs to the dining room. Her father

and a friend were about to sit down at the table.

"Sorry to be late, Daddy," she apologized, slipping into her chair. "Good evening, Mr. Holloway."

"Good evening, Miss Dorothy," returned the gentleman with a smile. "You seem a bit blown."

"Some rush!" she sighed, "but I made it!"

"Youth," remarked her father, "is nothing if not inconsistent. We dine early, so that Dorothy can get to the Sillies at some unearthly hour, and—"

His daughter interrupted.

"Please, Daddy. I had an awfully exciting experience this afternoon. I'd have been home in plenty of time, otherwise."

"At the Beach Club?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Well, suppose you tell us the story, as penance." He turned to his guest. "How about it, Holloway? This should interest you, one of the club's most prominent swimming fans!"

Mr. Holloway nodded genially. He

was older than Mr. Dixon, between fifty and sixty, tall and rather thin. He had the brow and jaw of a fighter, and his iron-grey side-whiskers gave him a rather formidable appearance. But Dorothy liked him, for his eyes, behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, beamed with friendliness.

"The Beach Club, eh?" He leaned back in his chair. "Yes, I take a dip most afternoons. Wonderful bracer after mornings in the city this hot weather. You ought to get down there more often."

"Well, there's a pool at the Country Club, and I'd rather play golf," argued his host. "I haven't been to the Beach Club this summer, but Dorothy tells me that the cabana you've built is quite a palace—much larger and more 'spiffy,' I think was the word, than those we ordinary members rent!"

"I like to be comfortable and have some privacy when I entertain my friends down there," Mr. Holloway admitted. "But I'm interested in hearing Dorothy's story. I was there this afternoon, but I didn't notice anything unusual."

"Did you see the airplane that landed in the cove?"

"Why, no. What time was that?"

"A little after five-fifteen."

"I had already left for home. I'm rarely at the club after five o'clock. I like a bright sun when I'm in the water. What about the plane?"

While Dorothy told of her experience with the bearded pilot, the two gentlemen continued their meal in silence.

"A nasty customer—that!" snapped her father when she had concluded. "But then, my dear, you shouldn't allow your keenness for aviation to over-excite your curiosity. Let it be a lesson to you not to interfere with other people's private business."

"You say that he wore a false beard?" interjected Mr. Holloway. "Now I wonder why the man wants to disguise himself? And why he was so standoffish about his plane?"

"He's probably in training for some test or endurance flight and wants to keep his identity secret for the time being," sug-

gested Mr. Dixon. "There's often a lot of hush-hush stuff about such things—that is, until the stunt comes off—and then the secretive ones become the world's worst publicity hounds!"

Dorothy remarked the change that came to their guest's face: the eyes narrowed, the mouth grew harder; something of his levity disappeared.

"Perhaps," he said slowly. "But whatever his reason for wishing privacy, we can't have club members insulted by strange aviators in our own cove. I shall take it up at the board of governors' meeting tomorrow. In future we will see to it that no more airplanes land on club waters. Do you think you would recognize the man without his beard, Dorothy?"

"I don't think so—but Terry, who was nearer to him, swears he could spot him anywhere."

"If he should do so, ask him to report the matter to me, and I'll see that the man at least offers apology."

"Thank you, Mr. Holloway." Dorothy was pleased at this interest. "I'll tell him."

"You three had better leave well enough alone," her father declared bluntly. "The plane is probably being flown over a set course which happens to take it over the club. That aviator seems to be a surly customer. My advice is to forget it. . . ."

Dorothy pushed her chair back from the table.

"You'll excuse me, won't you?" she smiled. "I've got to run, now." She went to her father and kissed him. "Please don't be late, Daddy. I come on the first time right after the curtain rises—it will spoil my evening if you two aren't there!"

Mr. Holloway's kindly eyes twinkled behind his glasses.

"Nice of you to include me. I wouldn't miss the first number for anything. I'll see that we're both there in time."

"Don't worry, sweetheart." Her father patted her hand. "We've got a small matter of business to go over and then we'll be right along. Success to you, dearest."

"'Bye!"

A fine rain was falling when Dorothy

stepped into her car. As yet it was more a heavy mist than a downpour. But with the wind in the east she realized that this part of the country was in for several days of wet weather. She drove carefully, for the winding wooded roads were slippery. Upon arriving at the Guild House, she changed at once into costume.

The Silvermine Sillies, like Mr. Ziegfield's more elaborate Follies, is invariably a revue, consisting of eighteen or twenty separate acts. As Dorothy stood in the wings, waiting for her cue, shortly after the first curtain rose, she was addressed by the stage manager:

"Have you seen Terry?"

"Not since this afternoon. Why?"

"He's not here."

Dorothy was fighting back the stage fright that always assailed her while waiting to "go on," but which always disappeared as soon as she made her entrance. She turned her mind to what the manager was saying with an effort.

"You mean he hasn't shown up?" she asked a bit vacantly.

"Your perception is remarkable," returned the harassed stage official with pardonable sarcasm. "No, Terry isn't here. Do you know whether he had any intention of putting in an appearance at this show tonight when you last saw him?"

Dorothy was wide awake now. "Of course he had!"

"He didn't mention some more important date, perhaps?"

"Of course not. Terry wouldn't do such a thing!"

"Well, he goes on in less than two minutes. Who in blazes am I to get to double for him? Deliver me from amateurs! There's your cue, Miss Dixon—better take it!"

"Hey, you, Bill!" she heard him call to a stage hand, as she made her entrance. "Duck into the men's dressing room and bring me Terry Walters' overalls and wig. Here's where I do his stuff without a make-up!"

Terry failed to show up during the first part of the program, so during the intermission, Dorothy slipped out front and

sought the delinquent's father and mother in the audience.

"Why, my dear, I'm quite as surprised as you are," gurgled Mrs. Walters. "Isn't this rain disgusting? You looked perfectly lovely Dorothy—and you did splendidly, splendidly, my dear. I thought I'd die when your rope of pearls broke and you went hunting for them—a perfect scream, my dear—the funniest thing in the show!"

"Those were Betty Mayo's pearls," said Dorothy. "I wasn't in that act. You say Terry left the house in plenty of time, and he expected to drive straight down here?"

Mrs. Walters had said nothing of the kind, but Dorothy had known the lady for years, and had long ago devised a method of securing information from her.

"He didn't even wait for dessert, my dear. He probably went to the movies or remembered some other date. Boys are like that!"

"Terry isn't." His father spoke up. "He must have been going to pick someone up and give them a lift down here—

then blew a shoe or something. Still, I don't like it. I hope the boy hasn't met with an accident."

"Oh, don't say that, Reggie! You make me feel positively faint. I know he has gone to the pictures." Mrs. Walters was nervously emphatic. "Don't be so silly, dear—I know he has."

"You know nothing of the kind," declared her husband.

"But, Reggie dear—"

Dorothy hurriedly excused herself and went back stage.

But by the time the final curtain was rung down, no Terry had appeared. Dorothy was really worried. Betty was giving a party to a number of the cast at her house in White Oak Shade, but despite protests, Dorothy made her regrets and went to look for her father.

"I think I'll beat it for home, Dad," she announced, buttonholing him near the door.

"I'll be along in a few minutes, darling. I certainly am more than extra proud of you tonight. I never realized what an ac-

tress you are. But you look troubled—anything the matter?"

"I'm worried about Terry. I know he wouldn't deliberately put us all in this hole. He's not that kind."

"Probably had a break-down," consoled her father. "Excuse me, dear, I want to speak to the Joneses over there."

Dorothy drove a six-cylinder coupe whose body had seen better days, though she claimed for its engine that the world had not seen its equal. With her windshield wiper working furiously, she came cautiously along Valley Road, her big headlamps staring whitely ahead. The rain was pelting down now, and since she must have a window open, and that window was on the weather side, one arm and part of the shoulder of her thin slicker were soon black and shining.

"Something he couldn't help—that's what made Terry let us down," said her subconscious mind, and she wondered how any of the cast could have expressed contrary opinions. She was glad she had re-

fused Betty's invitation. She liked Terry and was deeply concerned about him. He wasn't the sort to default unless something unforeseen and unusual occurred. Mrs. Walters said he had been full of the show at dinner and had spoken about getting to the Guild House early. Something had come up, that was certain. And that someing, after he had started for Silvermine in his car. The more she thought about it, the more mysterious it seemed. She would phone the Walters again as soon as she reached home. Maybe he would be back by that time.

The car skidded round the turn into the Ridge Road that ran past the Dixon place. A mile farther on, Dorothy decided it would be well for her to keep her mind on the road ahead. A few minutes before, a lumbering truck had almost driven her into the ditch, and now, with a mile to go, she saw ahead of her three red lights. She slowed her engine until she came within a dozen yards of them.

They were red lamps, placed in a line across the road, and if they meant anything,

it was that the road was under repair and closed. Yet she had passed the truck going at full speed just beyond the corner. From its lights, she was sure it had come along this stretch of road.

She peered through the open window and saw on her left a delapidated stone fence, the top of which was hidden under a blanket of wild honeysuckle. She saw by her headlights a gap where once she knew a five-barred gate had blocked the way to the open field. All this she took in at a glance, for Dorothy knew exactly where she was. Then she turned again to her scrutiny of the road and the three red lamps.

"Well!" said Dorothy to herself. She switched out all the lights of the car, and taking something from her pocket, she opened the door quietly and stepped into the rain. She stood there for a while, listening.

There was no sound except the swish and patter of the storm. Keeping to the centre of the road she advanced slowly toward the red lights, picked up the middle one and

examined it. The lantern was old—the red had been painted on the glass. The second lantern was newer, but of entirely different pattern. Here also, the glass pane had been covered by some red, transparent paint. And this was the case with the third lamp.

Dorothy threw the middle light into the ditch and found satisfaction in hearing the crash of glass. Then she came back to her car, got inside, slammed the door and put her foot down on the starter. The motor whined but the engine did not move. The car was hot and never before had it failed. Again she tried, but without success.

"This looks suspicious," she muttered to herself.

She sprang out into the rain again and walked to the back to examine her gasoline tank. There was no need, for the indicator said, "Empty."

"I'll say suspicious!" she muttered again, angrily, as she stared down at the cause of her plight.

She had filled up just before dinner, but notwithstanding that fact, here was a trust-

worthy indicator pointing grimly to "E"; and when she tapped the tank, it gave forth a hollow sound in confirmation.

Dorothy sniffed: the air reeked with fumes. Flashing her pocket light on the ground she saw a metal cap and picked it up. Then she understood what had happened. The roadway, under her light, gleamed with opalescent streaks. Someone had taken out the cap and emptied her tank while she was examining the red lamps!

She refastened the cap, which was airproof, waterproof, and foolproof, and which could only have been turned by the aid of a spanner—she had heard no chink of metal against metal. She did not carry reserve fuel, but home was not more than a mile down the road, round the turn. And she knew there was a path from the gap in the stone wall, across the field and through a belt of woods that would halve the distance.

She sent her flashlight in the direction of the open gateway. One of the posts was broken and the rotting structure

leaned drunkenly against a lilac bush. In the shadow behind the bush, she was certain that a dark form moved.

Dorothy lingered no longer, but switching off her light, she turned on her heel and raced up the road.

Chapter III

WHERE'S TERRY?

Behind her, Dorothy heard a shout, and that shout lent wings to her feet. Scared as she was, she grinned. For she was probably doing the only thing her would-be assailants had not counted on. She was running away from the red lights and home, sprinting down the road the way she had come. Overhead, tall elms met in an archway, and from the darkness at her back came the quick patter of footsteps. Suddenly they stopped.

Dorothy gave a sigh of joyous relief, for around the bend in the road she saw the double gleam of headlights, shining through the wet. Stopping short in the middle of the road, she switched on her flashlight again and waved it frantically from side to side.

"Daddy!" she cried as the big car drew up. "I was sure you weren't far away.

Gee! but I was glad to see your lights."

Mr. Dixon snapped open the door and Dorothy slipped in beside him.

"Why, what are you doing out here? Have a breakdown?"

"H-holdup," she panted. "My car's down the road. Step on it, Dad—maybe we can catch them."

"An ounce of discretion is sometimes worth forty pounds of valor," he began, throwing in the clutch.

Dorothy cut him short. "Look!" she cried excitedly, and for all Mr. Dixon's cautious announcement, the car jumped forward with a jerk. "See, Daddy! There's my tail light! They've turned it on again. And the red lights have disappeared."

"What red lights?"

"Tell you in a minute. Better slow down. My car's out of gas. I've got a piece of hose in the rumble. We can siphon enough from your tank into mine to get me home."

Mr. Dixon brought his car to a stop directly behind Dorothy's coupe.

"Before we do anything, I want to hear

exactly what happened, dear. You scared your fond parent out of a year's growth when I caught sight of you waving that light in the middle of the road!"

"Poor old Daddy." She threw an arm about his neck. "You weren't half as frightened as I was. Those men were pelting down the road behind me and—"

Her father broke in. "Well, they seem to have disappeared now. Let me hear the beginning."

In a few short sentences, Dorothy told him.

"So you see," she ended. "There's nothing more for us to do about it, I guess, except to put some gas in my tank, and go home."

"Wait a minute. Hand over that flash, please." He opened the door and with an agility surprising in so large a man, sprang into the wet road and ran toward the gap in the wall.

As he ran, Dorothy saw a light flash in his hand. Then he went out of sight behind the wall but she could still see the gleam through the bushes. Presently he

came back to where she was standing beside the car.

"Vamoosed!" He tossed the flash onto the seat. "As there's no car on the road ahead they must have beat it over the field. I wonder why they didn't hold you up when you'd stopped for those red lanterns? Strange. Also, why do you suppose they switched on your lights?"

"It's beyond me. Well, Daddy, if you'll pull alongside we'll siphon the gas. This place and the rain and everything gives me the shivers. Let's talk it over when we get home."

Soon they were under way, and they continued on to the Dixon place without further incident.

"Your shoes are soaking wet, Dorothy. Go up to your room and change them, my dear," decreed her father. "While you're doing that, I'll phone Walters."

When Dorothy came downstairs her father was in the living room.

"Come over here and sit down," he said, making room for her on the lounge beside him. "Terry has not come home yet. The

family pretend not to be worried—and that's that. I said nothing about what happened to you on your way back from Silvermine."

His daughter groaned. "Oh dear—if we could only figure out—but those three red lights seem to cinch things, Daddy."

"Hardly that. But they do make it look as though this disappearing business is pretty serious—"

Dorothy interrupted him eagerly: "Then there isnt any doubt in your mind but that our experience at the club this afternoon is accountable for Terry's disappearance, and my holdup?"

Mr. Dixon, who was filling his pipe, struck a match and puffed contemplatively.

"We can't jump at conclusions, my dear. My first idea about that plane may be the right one. On the other hand, this business tonight certainly forces one's suspicions. If Terry doesn't show up by morning, we'll turn the matter over to the police and start a thorough search. But I do think it wise to keep the story of the amphibian and its pilot to ourselves."

Dorothy nodded. "You mean that if we spread our suspicions to the police, they'd let the cat out of the bag and the man would be on his guard?"

"That's just it. And then you must remember that we really have no facts to go on as yet."

"Well, I think I'll go to bed," yawned Dorothy. "Do you mind if I try to trail that plane with my own?"

"Not if you'll promise to be careful, dear. In fact, I think it's a good idea. But one thing I must insist upon and that is—you're to keep me posted. No more of this taking things into your own hands, as you did with the Martinellis. It's too dangerous. Confide in your old Dad, girl, and we'll do a lot better."

Dorothy was half way across the room, but here she turned and ran back to her father and kissed him. "Of course I'll tell you everything. Isn't it too bad, though, that Bill Bolton is away? He'd have been a wonderful help. Have you any idea what he is doing?"

"All I know is what his father told me—

that he's off on some government job. It may be secret service work, again. Anyway, he's to be away indefinitely, I understand. Now, just one thing more."

"Oh, *Daddy! More* instructions to take care of myself?"

Mr. Dixon laughed at her outraged expression, and relit his pipe.

"Not exactly—you seem to have the luck to generally land on your feet. But, I want you to consider this: if the bearded aviator or his associates *are* behind Terry's disappearance, they kidnapped him because they thought he would recognize the man. And they tried to do the same thing to you tonight."

"Why on earth should they fear being recognized?"

"Haven't the slightest idea. It depends on what they're up to. There must be a strong motive behind it. You don't strike a match unless you want a light. But unless we're chasing moonbeams, something illegal is going on and if there is a hunt for Terry tomorrow, I don't want you to take part in it."

"You think they'll try to get me again?"

"It is highly possible." Her father got to his feet and put his hands on her shoulders. "So promise me you won't go running about country byroads in your car, even during daylight hours. If you must go out at night, either I or Arthur must be in the car with you." (Arthur was the Dixons' chauffeur-gardener.) "There's no use trying to pretend I'm not worried about this mysterious business. Be a good girl and don't make it harder for me, please."

"I'll be good, Daddy. If I find out anything tomorrow, I'll report at dinner."

"That's my girl," he beamed, and kissed her good night. "I shall nose about, myself, a bit. I'm sure that you and Terry know that bearded aviator or some of his friends. Otherwise, he wouldn't be so perturbed about recognition. Unless we're all wet, Dorothy, this affair is made up of local people. Mind your step—and we'll see. Go to bed now and get a good rest—I'm coming upstairs as soon as I've locked up."

Chapter IV

THE THUNDERHEAD

Dorothy telephoned the Walters next morning, to learn from a maid that Terry was still missing, and that Mr. Walters was down in the village, putting the matter in the hands of the police.

"May I speak to Mrs. Walters?" she asked.

"I'm afraid not, miss. Mrs. Walters has been up all night. Doctor Brown has given her a sleeping powder and issued orders that she is not to be disturbed."

"If there is anything that I can do," said Dorothy, "telephone me."

"Thank you, miss. I'll tell Mr. Walters when he comes home."

Dorothy rang off and went about her household duties with a heavy heart.

Later on she motored to the village to do her marketing, and upon her return found that her father had telephoned. She

immediately called up the New Canaan Bank, of which he was president.

"Any news, Daddy?" she inquired anxiously, as soon as she was put through to him.

"That you, Dorothy?" she heard him say. "Yes—Terry's car has been found."

"*Where,* Daddy?"

"On a wood road in the hills back of the Norwalk reservoir. The car was empty. A farmer driving through there found it early this morning and phoned the license number to the police."

"But what in the world could Terry have been doing way over there? I know that road. It's no more than a bridle path—the reservoir is three or four miles beyond Silvermine."

"My opinion is that Terry was never anywhere near the place," explained her father. "He was undoubtedly held up, removed to another car and his own run over to the spot where it was found."

"No sign of him, I suppose?"

"No. I've talked with Walters. The poor man is nearly off his head with worry.

We're getting up searching parties to cooperate with the police. I'll see you at dinner tonight. It will be impossible for me to get home at noon."

"I'll hope to have some news for you, then," said Dorothy.

"Going up in spite of the rain?"

"I've got to. We can't afford to waste time—the weather's not so bad."

"There are storm warnings out all along the coast."

"I'll be careful, Daddy."

"All right. Bye-bye till dinner time."

"'Bye."

She hung up the receiver and for the rest of the morning, busied herself about the house, determined not to let her mind dwell upon the darker side of this latest development. After lunch she changed into flying clothes and went out to the hangar.

Unlocking the doors, she set to work filling the amphibian's gasoline tanks. Then she went over the engine carefully and gave it a short ground test. After that, the instruments came under her inspection. Altogether, she gave her plane a thorough

overhauling, which was not entirely necessary, but kept her from thinking and helped to kill time.

About twenty minutes to five she ran the amphibian out of the hangar and took off into the teeth of a fine rain. It was no part of her plan to fly in the neighborhood of the Beach Club until the plane she was seeking should put in an appearance. Her self-imposed duty was to spot the mysterious amphibian and to follow it to its destination without allowing the pilot or an understudy to spot her.

So instead of banking and heading for Tokeneke, when her bus had sufficiently topped the trees, she continued to keep the stick back so as to maintain a proper climbing angle. Back in her first thirty-hours of early flight training, it would have been difficult for her to keep *Will-O'-the-Wisp* (more often termed Willie or Wispy) at the correct angle safely below the stalling point, unless she could first recognize that angle by the position of the plane's nose relative to the horizon. On a wet day like this with an obscured horizon it would

have been well nigh impossible: at best, a series of bad stalls would have been the result. But now her snapping gray eyes sparkled with exhilaration; she no longer needed the horizon as a guide. Between leveling off every thousand feet or so, to keep the engine from overheating, she shot *Will-O'-the-Wisp* up to six thousand, maintaining the proper angle of climb by the "feel" of the plane alone.

With her altimeter indicating the height she wanted, she leveled off again; then, executing a sharp reverse control or "flipper" turn to the left she resumed straight flight again by the application of up aileron and opposite rudder. The plane was now headed south, several points to the west of the Beach Club.

The visibility was even poorer than at a lower level, but the young pilot knew this part of the country as she knew her own front lawn. Either dropping or swerving her plane's nose at frequent intervals so as to get an unimpeded view ahead, she passed over the wooded ridges toward the shore, over the city of Stamford and out over the

slate grey waters of Long Island Sound.

That body of water is some six or eight miles wide at this point, and upon reaching the opposite short, Dorothy commenced a patrol of the Long Island shore line from Lloyds' Neck, which lies just west of Oyster Bay, to the farther side of Smithtown Bay, a distance of fifteen or sixteen miles. And as she flew, she kept a sharp lookout for planes appearing out of the murk toward the Connecticut shore.

Since she knew it was the bearded aviator's practice to fly at a comparatively low altitude, Dorothy chose to keep *Will-O'-the-Wisp* at this greater height for two reasons. An airplane flying far above another plane is much more unlikely to be noticed by the pilot of the lower plane than one flying at his own level or below him. Then again, by keeping to the higher air, Dorothy, under normal weather conditions, was bound to increase her range of vision proportionately. Her plan was a good one. But weather is not a respecter of plans. The visibility, poor enough when she started, gradually grew worse and

worse. Although what wind there was seemed to have died, long curling tongues of mist crept out of the east, while above her head she saw black thunder clouds, sinking lower and lower.

Now one of the first things any aviator learns is that fog must be avoided at all costs. Any attempt to land in it is attended by considerable danger. Dorothy knew only too well that in case of a fog bank cutting the plane off from its destination, the flight must be discontinued by a landing, or by return to the point of departure.

She glanced overside again. Long Island Sound was no longer visible.

"He's late now, unless I've missed him," she said to herself. "I'll finish this leg of the patrol and if he doesn't show up by the time I'm over Oyster Bay, *Willie* and I will head for home."

Pushing her stick slightly forward to decrease her altitude, she continued along her course.

Three minutes later, she realized her mistake. The wisps of fog seemed to gather together, and *Will-o'-the-Wisp* sank

into an opaque bank that blinded her.

"Gee, but I'm stupid!" she mumbled. "What was it that text-book I read only yesterday said? 'In the event of general formation of fog below, an immediate landing must be made before it becomes thick enough to interfere seriously with the approach.' Heavens, what a fool I am! Now that we're in it, though, I might as well see if it thins out nearer the water."

Her compass told her she was flying almost due west. Throttling down the engine, she pushed her stick still farther forward, at the same time applying right aileron and hard right rudder. As the proper gliding angle was reached, she neutralized her elevators and held the nose up as necessary. Next, she checked her wing with the ailerons and eased her rudder pressure. Then having made a quarter-spiral with a change in course of 90 degrees, she applied left aileron and hard left rudder until the wings were level laterally, and with her stick still held forward, continued to descend in a straight glide until she was within fifteen hundred feet of the water. The

plane was heading directly back across Long Island Sound toward the Connecticut shore.

But each moment the fog seemed to grow more dense. To land blindly meant a certain nose-in and was out of the question. And even if the mist did not hold to the water's level, to fly lower meant the chance of striking the mast or spar of a ship, a lighthouse, perhaps, or anything else that came her way.

"We're up against it, *Wispy*," she murmured, opening the throttle and pulling back her stick. "If we can't go down, at least we can 'go above,' as they say in the Navy. Beat it for the heavens, my dear. This beastly fog can't run all the way to Mars!"

Dorothy was not frightened, although she knew how serious was her predicament. No pilot likes flying blind in a fog. With the knowledge that what one sees, one hits, it is a nerve-wracking experience.

But Dorothy's nerves were good—none better—and she sent her plane into a long, steady climb, hoping for the best and keep-

ing her vivid imagination well within control.

Headed into the north, she continued her climb, leveling off every few thousand feet to ease the strain on her engine. When the altimeter marked thirteen thousand she began to worry, for the service ceiling of her plane was but two thousand higher. The cold damp of the thick mist penetrated like a knife. Hemmed in by the dank grey walls, she could barely distinguish the nose of her ship. The active needles of the altimeter and rate of climb indicator were the only visible signs that *Will-O'-the-Wisp* was moving at all.

Fourteen thousand feet—intense physical discomfort, added to the nervous strain, were becoming intolerable. Dorothy clenched her chattering teeth in an effort to retain her control. Then with a suddenness astonishing, the fog parted and she sailed into clear air.

Below her the heavy mist swirled and rolled like a sluggish sea, grey-yellow streaked with dirty streamers, while directly ahead loomed a towering mass of

cotton-like clouds rising tier upon tier as far as she would see.

A quick glance over her shoulder and to the sides, brought forth the fact that this small pocket of free air was entirely surrounded by similar cloud formations. There was no time for thought. Automatically, her hand clasping the stick shot forward, bringing down the nose to the position of level flight, and she drove the amphibian straight at the thunderhead. Immediately afterward the plane passed into the cloud, and like a leaf caught in an inverted maelstrom, it was whipped out of her control.

Gripped by tremendous air forces, the amphibian was shot up and sideways, at a speed that burned Dorothy's lungs. Tossed about like a rag doll, with her safety-belt almost cutting her body in two, she was thrown hither and yon with the plane, blind, and without the slightest idea as to her position.

Never in her wildest nightmares had she dreamed that a heavy plane, weighing close to four thousand pounds when empty,

could be tossed about in such fashion by currents of the air.

For a space of time that seemed years, she was entirely away from the controls. But gradually, with infinite effort and in spite of the whirling jolts of her air steed, Dorothy managed to hook her heels under the seat. A second later she had caught the stick and was pushing it forward into the instrument board.

Will-O'-the-Wisp reared like an outlawed bronco, then dived until the airspeed indicator showed one hundred and sixty-five miles per hour. Still her downward speed was less than the rate of the upward draft, for the rate of climb indicator told the frenzied girl that the plane was being lifted fourteen hundred feet per minute.

Still diving at 45 degrees, the phenomenal force of the updraft carried the plane to the mushroom top of the cloud, where with a jar like an elevator hitting the ceiling, it was flung forth into the outer air.

Chapter V

HIDE AND SEEK

The strong air current which spread horizontally over the thunderhead blew Dorothy's plane sideways and away from the cloud. An instant later it was roaring downward in the thin air, quite beyond her control, a self-propelled projectile rushing to its doom.

While shooting upward in the cloud, the violent and intensely rapid gyrations of the airship caused her safety belt to become unclasped, and had her parachute not caught in the cowling, she must have been flung clear of the plane to a horrible death far below.

With her heels still hooked beneath the pilot's seat, she wrenched the parachute loose. Then she closed the throttle and half-suffocated by the force of the wind and lack of breathable oxygen, she commenced to pull the stick slowly backward.

A glance at the altimeter showed a height of eighteen thousand feet—three air miles above earth—and three thousand feet above *Will-O'-the-Wisp's* service ceiling.

Notwithstanding the shut-off engine, the speed of the diving plane was terrific. Dorothy felt the grinding jar of the wind-strained wings as the nose began to rise in answer to the pull of the elevators; and wondered helplessly if they would hold.

The air pressure was agony to her ear-drums. Her head reeled. She was well nigh exhausted. She no longer cared very much what happened.

The plane dropped into a blanket of fog. She felt the wet mist on her face, refreshing and reanimating her. Suddenly she realized that her parachute was starting to fill and would shortly pull her out of the cockpit. With her free hand she reached under the seat and brought forth a sheath knife. A frenzied second later she had rid herself of the flapping bag. As it flew overboard, she tightened her safety belt and placed her cramped feet back on the steering pedals.

Though still fog-blind, she could at least

breathe comfortably now as the plane lessened speed in descent. *Will-O'-the-Wisp* still shook and groaned, but no longer fought the pull of the stick. Up came the nose, slowly but surely and with her ailerons functioning once more, Dorothy gained control and sent the plane into a normal glide. The altimeter marked five thousand feet. The dive had been over two miles long.

Another fifteen hundred feet and gradually the mist lightened until it became mere wisps of smoky cloud. Long Island Sound had been left behind. Below lay the wooded hills and valleys of the Connecticut ridge country, cloaked in multi-shaded green. As she still headed north, Dorothy knew now that she had been blown beyond New Canaan. She gave the plane hard right rudder and right aileron and sent it swinging into a long half spiral, which, completed, headed her south again. Almost directly below, she recognized the Danbury Fair Grounds, with home just twenty miles away.

Again her hand sought the throttle and

as *Will-O'-the-Wisp* snorted, then roared, Dorothy breathed a thankful sigh. Fifteen minutes later she had housed her plane in its hangar, and was limping up the porch steps of her home.

Lizzie, the Dixon's servant, met her in the hall.

"Whatever is the matter, Miss Dorothy? You've had an accident—you're half-killed —I know you are! There's blood all over your face—"

Her young mistress interrupted, smiling:

"You're wrong again, Lizzie. No accident, though I know I look pretty awful. I feel that way, too, if you ask me—"

"But the blood, Miss Dorothy?"

"It's from a nosebleed, Lizzie. I assure you I'm not badly hurt. If you'll help me out of these rags and start a warm bath running, I'll be ever so much obliged. A good soaking in hot water will fix me up. Then," she added, "I think I'll be real luxurious and have my dinner in bed."

When the solicitous Lizzie brought up the dinner tray three-quarters of an hour

later, a tired but decidedly sprucer Dorothy, in pink silk pyjamas, was leaning back against her pillows.

"My word, I'm hungry!" She seized a hot roll and began to butter it. "I'm off bucking thunderheads for life, Lizzie. But you can take it from me, that kind of thing gives you a marvelous appetite!"

"Yes, miss, I'm glad," returned Lizzie, who had no idea what Dorothy was talking about. "You certainly look better."

"By the way, what's become of Daddy? Hasn't he got home yet?"

"Oh, Miss Dorothy, I'm so sorry. Sure and I forgot to tell ye—Mr. Dixon won't be home for dinner."

"Did he telephone?"

"No, miss. He came home about quarter to five and packed his suitcase. He said to tell you he'd been called to Washington on business and he'd be gone a couple of days. Arthur drove him to Stamford to catch the New York express—he didn't have much time."

Dorothy helped herself to a spoonful of jellied bouillon. "Any other message?"

"Yes, miss. He said that Mister Terry hadn't been found yet. I asked him b'cause I thought you'd like to know. That was all he said. I'm sure sorry I forgot it when you came in, but I—"

"That's all right, Lizzie, I understand. You come back for the tray in half an hour, will you? And if you find me asleep, don't wake me up. I'm tired to death. I need a long rest and I'm going to take it."

When Lizzie came back she found Dorothy deep in the sleep of exhaustion. She lowered the window blinds against the early morning light and picking up the tray from the end of the bed, tiptoed from the room.

Morning broke bright and clear with no sign of yesterday's mist and rain. Dorothy remained in bed for breakfast and it took but little persuasion on the part of Lizzie to keep her there till lunch time. She still felt stiff and bruised and was only too content to rest and doze.

Toward noon she rose and dressed in her flying clothes. Immediately after lunch she went out to the hangar. She

slipped into a serviceable and grubby pair of overalls, and spent the afternoon in giving *Will-O'-the-Wisp* a thorough grooming. At quarter to five she was in the air and headed for Long Island Sound.

Half an hour later, with an altitude of ten thousand feet, she was cruising over yesterday's course above the Long Island shore, when she spied a biplane coming across the Sound. In an instant she had her field glasses out and focussed on the newcomer.

"That's him!" she murmured ungrammatically, though with evident relief. "Now for a pleasant little game of hide-and-seek!"

The *Mystery Plane* was flying far below, so continuing on her course at right angles, she watched it with hurried glances over her shoulder. When she reached the Long Island Shore line, it was a mile or so behind and below Dorothy's tailplane. So waiting only long enough to be sure that her quarry was headed across the Island, she banked her plane and sent it on a wide half circle to the right. Long Island, at

this point, she knew was about twenty miles wide.

Dorothy's plan for trailing the *Mystery Plane* and doing so without being seen, was as simple as it was direct. The farther end of her circular course would bring her over Great South Bay and the South shore of Long Island at approximately the same point for which the other plane seemed to be bound. She would arrive, of course, a minute or two behind the other aviator. And as she planned, so it happened.

From her high point of vantage, Dorothy, swinging on her arc a mile or so to the east, was able to keep the other amphibian continually in sight. She watched him pursue his southerly course until he came over the town of Babylon on Great South Bay. Here her glasses told her that the bearded aviator turned his plane to the left, heading east and up the bay in her direction.

Below her now lay the Bay, hemmed in from the Atlantic by long narrow stretches of white sand dunes. For a second or so Dorothy thought they would pass in the

air, her plane far above the other. But before she reached that point, she saw the other make a crosswind landing and taxi toward a dock which jutted into the Bay from the dunes. Just beyond the dock an isolated cottage stood in a hollow on the bay side of the dunes. There was no other habitation in sight for over a mile in either direction.

"Aha! Run to earth at last!" muttered Dorothy contentedly. Maintaining her altitude, with Babylon across the bay to her right, she continued her westward course above the dunes.

A few miles past the cottage she flew over Fire Island Inlet. When she was opposite Amityville, she came about. Shutting off her engine, she tilted the stick forward and sent *Will-O'-the-Wisp* into a long glide which eventually landed her on the waters of Babylon harbor.

Dorothy stripped off her goggles and scanned the waterfront. Slightly to her left she spied a small shipyard, whose long dock bore a large sign which carried the legend: "Yancy's Motor Boat Garage."

"Good. Couldn't be better!" exclaimed Miss Dixon in great satisfaction. "Atta girl, Wispy! We're going over to have a talk with Mr. Yancy."

She gave her plane the gun and taxiing slowly over the smooth water, through the harbor shipping, presently brought up at the Yancy wharf and made fast.

"Hello, there! Want gas?" sang out a voice above her, and Dorothy looked up. A smiling young man, dressed in extremely dirty dungarees was walking down the wharf toward her.

"Hello, yourself!" she returned as he came up. "No, I'm not out of gas, thank you. I want to hire a boat."

"Better come ashore, then." The man wiped his palms on a piece of clean cotton waste and gave her a hand up. "We've got plenty of boats—all kinds, lady. Got 'em fast and slow, big and little. Just what kind of a craft do you need?"

"Something with plenty of beam and seaworthy, that I can run without help. I'm not looking for speed. I may want to take her outside—I don't know."

The young man pointed down the wharf to where a rather bulky motor boat, broad of beam and about thirty feet waterline was moored head out to a staging.

"*Mary Jane*—that's your boat," announced Mr. Yancy. "She's old and she ain't got no looks, but she's seaworthy and she'll take you anywhere. You could run over to Paris or London in that old craft if you could pile enough gas aboard her."

"She looks pretty big," Dorothy's tone was dubious. "Think I can handle her by myself?"

"She is big," he admitted readily, "but she runs like a sewing machine and she's all set to be taken out this minute if you want her."

"I'll look her over anyway," she declared and led the way to the landing stage.

Stepping aboard the *Mary Jane,* she peeped into the small trunk cabin which was scarcely bigger than a locker, but would give shelter in case of rain. She observed that there were sailing lights, compass, horn and a large dinner bell in a rack, and two life preservers as well. In

one of the lockers she came upon a chart. Stowed up in the forepeak were an anchor with a coil of line and three five-gallon tins of gasoline. A quick examination showed the fuel tank to have been filled.

The motor was a simple and powerful two-cylinder affair, with make-and-break ignition, noisy, but dependable; the sort of engine on which the fishermen and lobstermen along the coast hang their lives in offshore work. It seemed to Dorothy that it ought to kick the shallow old tub along at a good ten-knot gait. The boat itself though battered and dingy, appeared to be sound and staunch so far as one could see.

"I'll take her," decided Dorothy. "That is, if she's not too expensive?"

"I guess we ain't goin' to fight about the price, mam," asserted Yancy. "How long will you be wantin' her and when do you expect to take her out?"

"Not before nine tonight—and I'll hire her for twenty-four hours."

"O. K. mam. You can have her for a year if you want her. How about your air bus?"

"She'll be left here. I want you to look after her. I don't think there'll be any wind to speak of. She'll be all right where she is."

"We're going to get rain in a couple of hours, so if you'll make her secure, I'll have her towed out to that buoy yonder. I'll rest easier with her moored clear of this dock."

"I'll pull the waterproof covers over the cockpits and she'll be all right," returned Dorothy. "Then we can go up to your office and fix up the finances."

Chapter VI

THE HOUSE ON THE DUNES

Having come to agreeable terms with Mr. Yancy and having secured the name and location of Babylon's best restaurant, Dorothy left the waterfront and walked uptown. A glance at her wrist-watch told her it was not yet seven o'clock. She was in no hurry, for she had more than two hours to wait before it would be dark enough to start. So she strolled along the bustling streets of the little city, feeling very much pleased with the way things were progressing.

Arrived at the restaurant, she ordered a substantial meal and while waiting for it to be served, sought a telephone booth. She asked for the toll operator and put in a call for New Canaan. A little while later she was summoned to the phone.

"Is that you, Lizzie? Yes. I—no, no, I'm perfectly all right—" she spoke sooth-

ingly into the transmitter. "Don't worry about me, please. I've had to go out of town, and I wanted to let you know that I won't be back till morning. Never mind, now. I'll see you tomorrow. Good-by!" She replaced the receiver and went back to her table, a little smile on her lips at the memory of Lizzie's distracted voice over the wire.

"Poor Lizzie! She's all worked up again at what she calls my 'wild doin's'," she thought. And with a determined glint her eyes, she proceeded to eat heartily.

When she had finished, she asked at the desk for a sheet of paper and an envelope. She took these over to her table, ordered a second cup of coffee, and began to compose a letter. This took her some time, for in it she explained her manoeuvers during the afternoon, and gave the exact location of the cottage on the dunes, where she believed the *Mystery Plane's* pilot had been bound. She ended with a sketch of her plans for the evening and addressed the envelope to Terry Walters' father. With her mind now easy in case of misadventure, she

paid her bill and walked back to the water front.

"Good evening, Miss Dixon," greeted Yancy as she stepped into his office. "I've done what you asked me to. You'll find a pair of clean blankets, some fresh water and eatables for two days stowed in the *Mary Jane's* cabin. I know you don't intend to be out that long, but it's always wise to be on the safe side with the grub."

"Thanks. You're a great help. Now, just one thing more before I shove off. Although I've rented your boat for twenty-four hours, I really expect to be back here tomorrow morning at the latest. If I don't turn up by noon, will you please send this letter by special delivery to Mr. Walters in New Canaan?"

"I sure will, Miss Dixon. But you're not lookin' for trouble, are you?"

Dorothy shook her head and smiled. "Nothing like that, Mr. Yancy. I just want Mr. Walters to know where I am and what I'm doing."

"Good enough, Mam. Anything else I can do?"

"Not a thing, thank you. Don't bother to come down to the wharf with me. I've got several things I want to do aboard before I set out."

"Just as you say. Good luck and a pleasant trip." Yancy's honest face wore a beaming grin as he doffed his tattered cap to Dorothy.

"Thank you again. Good night."

Dorothy went outside and found that Yancy's prediction of rain earlier in the evening had been justified.

"Lucky this is drizzle instead of fog," she thought as she hurried down to the landing stage. "I'd be out of luck navigating blind on Great South Bay!"

She dove into the *Mary Jane's* cabin and after lighting the old fashioned oil lamp in its swinging bracket, put on her slicker and sou'wester. Then she fished the chart of the bay out of the locker and spent the next quarter of an hour in an intensive study of local waters.

Having gained an intimate picture of this part of the bay, she plotted her course, and checked up on the blankets and food.

That done, she blew out the lamp, picked up the anchor and left the cabin, closing the door behind her.

Outside in the drizzle, she deposited her burden in the bow, making the anchor rope fast to a ring bolt in the decking. Then she put a match to the side lights and coming aft, cast off from the staging. Next, she started the motor, a difficult undertaking. At the third or fourth heave of the heavy flywheel it got away with a series of barking coughs. She slid in behind the steering wheel and they headed out across the bay.

Night had fallen, but notwithstanding the light rain, visibility on the water was good. The tide, as Dorothy knew, was at the flood, so she cut straight across for the dull, intermittent glow of the Fire Island Light. The boat ran strongly and well and Dorothy gave the engine full gas. She knew from experience that one of its primitive type was not apt to suffer from being driven, but on the contrary was inclined to run more evenly.

It had been at least two years since she

had sailed on Great South Bay, but she remembered it to be a big, shallow puddle, where in most places a person capsized might stand on bottom and right the boat.

"No danger of capsizing with the *Mary Jane,*" she reflected, "she's built on the lines of a flounder—I'll bet she'd float in a heavy dew!"

The two and a half feet of tide made it possible for her to hold a straight course and presently she could see the dim outline of sand dunes. The faint easterly draft of air brought the roar of the Atlantic swell as it boomed upon the beach outside. It was time to change her course.

A quarter turn of the wheel swung the *Mary Jane* to port and straightening out, she headed across the inlet. Five minutes later she had picked up the dunes on the farther side. With the dunes off her starboard quarter, Dorothy made the wheel fast with a bight of cord she had cut for the purpose, and going forward, extinguished her side lights.

Back at the wheel again, she steered just as close to the shore as safety permitted.

For the next couple of miles she ran along the shallows.

"Thank goodness!" she muttered at last. Swinging the *Mary Jane* inshore, she cut her motor and headed into a small cove, to ground a moment later on a pebbly beach.

Springing ashore, Dorothy dragged the anchor up the beach and buried it at its full length of rope in the sand. Then with a sigh of satisfaction, she straightened her back and took a survey of her surroundings.

The little beach ran up to a cupshaped hollow, encompassed by high sand dunes. She had noticed the inlet on the large scale chart, and chose it because she figured that it lay about a mile on the near side of the cottage she sought. And since she had decided to use the motor boat instead of the plane because she wanted to cover her approach, this spot seemed made to order for her purpose.

Her eyes scanned the skyline, and for a moment her heart almost stopped. Surely she had seen the head of a man move in that clump of long, coarse grasses at the

top of the incline! Standing perfectly still, although her body tingled with excitement, she continued to stare at the suspicious clump.

Then with characteristic decision, she drew a revolver from her pocket and raced up the side of the dune. But although she exerted herself to the utmost, her progress was much too slow. Her feet sank deep in the shifting sand until she was literally wading, clawing with her free hand for holds on the waving sandgrass.

Panting and floundering, she pulled herself to the top, only to find no one there. Nor so far as she could see was there any living thing in sight. The deep boom of the surf was louder here, and peering through the rain, she made out the long stretch of beach pounded by combers, not more than a couple of hundred yards away. Some distance to the right, facing the ocean twinkled the lights of a row of summer cottages. To her left nothing could be seen but tier after tier of grass-topped dunes, a narrow barrier of sand between Great South Bay and the Atlantic Ocean,

bleak and desolate, extending farther than the eye could reach.

Despite this evidence to the contrary, Dorothy still retained the impression that she was not alone. She had an uneasy conviction that she was being watched. She shivered.

"My nerves must be going fuzzy," she thought disgustedly. "I can't risk using a flash, and if there were any tracks this stiff breeze from the sea would have filled them in while I was climbing up here. Well, get going, Dorothy, my girl—this place is giving you the creeps—good and plenty."

The Colt was slipped back into her slicker, and she trudged through the loose sand to the black stretch of ocean beach. Here, walking was better, and turning her back on the lighted cottages, she set out along the hard shingle by the surf.

Several times during that walk, Dorothy stopped short and scanned the long line of dunes above her. Try as she might, it seemed impossible to rid herself of the idea that someone was following. When she judged the remaining distance to the

cottage to be about a quarter of a mile, she left the beach and continued her way over the dunes.

Although Dorothy had no tangible fact to connect the *Mystery Plane* with her holdup in New Canaan and Terry's disappearance, she approached the lonely cottage with the stealth of a red Indian. And even if this night reconnoiter should prove only that the bearded aviator had a sweetie living on the shore of Great South Bay, or that he was making daily trips to visit friends, she had no intention of being caught snooping. No matter what she should learn of the cottage's inmates, if anything, she proposed to return with the *Mary Jane* to Yancy's wharf and spend the rest of the night aboard. She had no desire to tramp about Babylon after midnight, looking for a hotel that would take her in.

As she slowly neared the cottage, taking particular pains now not to appear on the skyline, she wished that this adventure was well over. She still felt the effects of her adventure with the thunderhead. The tiny cabin of the motor boat seemed more and

more inviting to the weary girl. Trudging through the rain over sand dunes was especially trying when one was walking away from bed rather than toward it.

Then she caught sight of the house roof over the top of the next dune and her flagging interest in her undertaking immediately revived.

Dorothy skirted the shoulder of the sandy hill, using the utmost precaution to make not the slightest sound. Then she squatted on her heels and held her breath. Directly ahead, not more than thirty or forty feet at most, gleamed the light from an open window, and from where she crouched, there was an unobstructed view of the room beyond.

There were three men sitting about an unpainted kitchen table which held three glasses and as many bottles. All were smoking, and deep in conversation. One man she knew immediately to be the bearded aviator with whom she had talked on the Beach Club shore. But although Dorothy strained her ears to the bursting point, the heavy pounding of the surf from

the ocean side prevented her from catching more than a confused rumble of voices.

For a moment or two she waited and watched. The other two men wore golf clothes, were young, and though they were not particularly prepossessing in appearance, she decided that they were American business men on a holiday. They certainly did not look like foreigners.

Miss Dixon, crouching beside the sand dune, felt vaguely disappointed. She did not know exactly what she had expected to find in the cottage, but she had been counting on something rather more exciting than the tableau now framed in the open window. But since she had come this far, it would be senseless not to learn all that was possible. Taking care to keep beyond the path of the light, she crept forward on her hands and knees until she was below the window. Here it was impossible to see into the room, but the voices now came to her with startling distinctness.

"Why?" inquired a voice which Dorothy immediately recognized as belonging to the aviator, though oddly

enough, it was now without accent. "You surely haven't got cold feet, Donovan?"

"Cold feet nothing! The man don't live that can give me chills below the knee," that gentleman returned savagely. "But I won't be made a goat of either, nor sit in a poker game with my eyes shut. Why should I? I've got as much to lose as you have."

"Those are my sentiments exactly," drawled a third voice, not unpleasantly. "Listen to that surf. There's a rotten sea running out by the light. Raining too, and getting thicker out there by the minute. By three o'clock you'll be able to cut the fog with a knife. What's the sense in trying it—we're sure to miss her, anyway."

"Perhaps you chaps would prefer my job," sneered the aviator. "You make me sick! But you'll have to do what the old man expects of you,—so why argue?"

"How come the old man always picks days like this to run up his red flag?" Donovan was talking again. "There's just as much chance of our picking up that stuff tonight as— as—"

"As finding a golf ball on a Scotchman's lawn," the third man finished for him. "I know there's no use grousing—but it's a dirty deal—and well, we've got to talk about something in this God-forsaken dump!"

"I don't blame you much," the aviator admitted, "but look at the profits, man. Well, I must be shoving off, myself. We'll have another bottle of beer apiece and—"

But Dorothy did not hear the end of that sentence. Her vigil was suddenly and rudely interrupted. Someone behind her thrust a rough arm under her chin, jerking back her head and holding her in an unbreakable grip. The sickly-sweet odor of chloroform half suffocated her. For a moment more she struggled, then darkness closed in about her.

Chapter VII

SHANGHAIED

Dorothy came slowly back to consciousness. She was vaguely aware of the chug-chug of a small engine somewhere near by. Her head swam and there was a sickly sensation at the pit of her stomach.

She tried to move, and found it impossible. She heard the splash of waves but could see nothing except the boarded wall of her prison a foot or so away from her eyes.

After a while she became accustomed to the gloom and her sight was clearer. She decided that the rounded wall was the side of a boat. Turning her head slightly she saw that she lay on the flooring of an open motor-sailor, beneath a thwart. It had stopped raining. Now the sound of the engine and the gurgle of water against the hull told her that the craft was moving.

She hadn't the slightest idea where this

cabinless craft was bound, or how she came to be aboard. Gradually there returned to her a confused memory of the cottage on the dunes, voices through the window. Someone's arm about her neck, forcing her head back—she remembered, now, and groaned. Her body was one stiffness and ache.

Again she tried to heave herself into sitting position, only to find that her ankles were bound with a turn or two of cord, and her wrists whipped together behind her back. She was trussed like a fowl, and by the feel of her bonds, the trusser was a seaman. She wriggled and writhed, consumed by rage at her own helplessness. The only result was to restore her circulation and clear her faculties, allowing her to realize just what had happened.

"Shanghied!" Dorothy muttered thickly. "Oh, if I'd only had a chance to let loose a little jiu jitsu on that beast who scragged me!"

Why had they brought her on board this boat and tied her hand and foot?

Where was the motor-sailor bound? What was going to happen to her next? Mr. Walters would probably get her letter during the afternoon. Yancy seemed a dependable sort of man. Without doubt a raid on the beach cottage would follow, but by that time the birds would have flown, and what good would the raid do her! Her thoughts ran on.

Those men in the cottage were not fools. Their conversation, as they sat around the table, had meant little to Dorothy, but she no longer doubted that the gang was interested in an undertaking that was illegal and fraught with considerable danger to themselves. Could it be bootlegging? Possibly. But Dorothy did not fancy that idea. The *Mystery Plane*, (she had got in the habit of calling it that now) hadn't enough storage capacity to carry any great quantity of liquor. Where did that amphibian come into this complicated scheme?

This night's work had turned out a failure so far as she was concerned: she should never have undertaken the job of ferreting out the truth alone.

If only Bill Bolton were not away. He would never have allowed her to get into this mess!

Suddenly she heard the creak of a board and the sound of footsteps approaching. Dorothy realized that she lay huddled in the bow of the craft, with her head aft and her feet forward. That was why she had not been able to see anything of the crew. She shut her eyes again as someone flashed a torch in her face.

"She's not much better," said a voice she recognized as belonging to the man called Donovan. "Doesn't look to me as if she'd be out of it for a long time. I think you must have given her an overdose of the stuff, Peters." He stirred her none too gently with his foot.

"I hope I did!" answered a new voice. "That little wildcat got my thumb between her teeth while I was holdin' the rag to her face. She bit me somethin' terrible, I tell yer."

"Never mind your thumb. We've heard enough of that already. How long did you hold the chloroform to her nose?"

"I dunno. I gave her plenty. If her light's out, I should worry."

"You're right, you should. I'm not handling stiffs on the price of this job." Donovan's tone was biting.

A hand pressed Dorothy's side.

"No stiffer than you are," affirmed Peters matter-of-factly. "I can feel her breathe."

"She looks pretty bad to me," Donovan insisted. "The old man will raise the roof if you don't get her over to Connecticut O.K. You know what he said over the phone!"

"Then why not ask Charlie? He used to be a doctor before he did that stretch up the river." He raised his voice. "Hey, there, Charlie! Leave go that wheel and come here for a minute."

"Can't be done," replied Charlie, and Dorothy knew that the third man on the beach cottage group was speaking. "What do you want me to do—run this sailor aground in the shallows?"

"Well, Donovan thinks the girl's goin' to croak."

"That's your worry. You're the lad who administered the anesthetic. You probably gave her too much."

"Say, Charlie, this is serious," Donovan broke in anxiously. "Quit high-hatting and give us your opinion."

The steersman snorted contemptuously. "She'll come out of it all right—that is, unless her heart's wobbly. If it is, I couldn't do anything for her out here. You're supposed to be running this show, Don, and Peters did your dirty work. I'm only the hired man. If she goes out, you two will stand the chance of burning, not me. Cut the argument! There's shipping ahead. What are you trying to do—wake the harbor?"

Donovan and Peters stopped talking and went aft. Presently their voices broke out again but this time came to the girl in the bow as a low, confused murmur.

So she owed this situation to Mr. Peters. Dorothy was feeling better now and despite her discomfort she spent several minutes contemplating what she would do to Mr. Peters, if she ever got the chance.

The motor-sailor's engine stopped chugging and soon the boat came to rest.

"I'll carry her in myself," spoke Donovan from somewhere beyond her range of vision. "Peters bungled the business when he was on watch at that dump across the bay. I want no more accidents until she's safely off my hands."

Dorothy was caught up in a pair of strong arms as if she had been so much mutton.

"Think I'd drop her in the drink?" laughed Peters.

"You said it.—Sure this is the right dock, Charlie?"

"No, Donny, it's the grill room of the Ritz—shake a leg there, both of you. We've got a long boat ride and a sweet little job ahead of us. We can't afford to be late—hustle!"

Donovan did not bother to reply to this parting shot. He slung Dorothy over his shoulder, stepped onto a thwart, from there to the gunwale and on to the dock. They seemed to be in some kind of backwater from where a set of steps led up from

the dock to a small wharfyard, shut in on three sides by high walls and warehouses.

Donovan shouldered open a door and ascended a narrow flight of rotting stairs. It had been dark in the yard, but inside the warehouse the night was Stygian. At the top he waited until Peters came abreast.

"Where's your flash, Peters?" he growled.

"Haven't got one, Cap."

"Here—take mine, then, and show a glim. It's in my side pocket. My hands are full of girl!"

"Got it," said Peters, a moment later.

The light came on and Dorothy, between half-shut eyelids saw that they were in a long, dismal corridor.

"I'll go ahead," continued the man, "I've got the key."

Down this long corridor they passed, then into another narrow passage running at right angles from the first.

Peters eventually stopped at a door which he unlocked and flung open.

"Here we are," he announced and preceded them over the sill.

Dorothy caught a glimpse of a small room that smelt of rats and wastepaper with a flavor of bilgewater thrown in. Then she closed her eyes as Donovan dumped her on the bare floor, propping her shoulders against the wall.

"Well, that's done," Donovan said with great satisfaction. "Are you going to wait here for the car, Peters, or out in the yard?"

"The yard for mine, Cap. This joint is full o' spooks. It's jollier outside."

"Right. We'll get going then."

Peters paused and looked at the girl. "There might be some change—maybe a bill or two in the lady's pockets, Cap?" He winked at Donovan hopefully.

"You leave the girl's money alone. The boss distinctly said not to search her. He wants her delivered just as she is."

"Well, what if she passes out on me hands, Cap?"

"Deliver her just the same. And mind—you obey orders or you'll bite off a heap more trouble than you can chew. Come along now!"

The two men left the room. The bolt in the door shot home, then the key turned in the lock. As the sound of their footsteps over the bare floor died away, Dorothy opened her eyes. Summoning all her strength, she wrenched at the bonds that held her, but she accomplished no more than lacerating her wrists.

She was to be shifted to some safer place, presumably in Connecticut, where she was to be taken by car. Meanwhile, there was no escape from where she was, even if her limbs were free. Should she show signs of consciousness, the best she had to hope for was another dose of chloroform or a gag when that enterprising thug, Mr. Peters, returned. He was not the kind to leave anything to chance.

Almost before she had got her wits to work, Dorothy heard steps in the passage and let herself go limp again, her knees drawn up, her head and neck against the wall. The bolt was drawn, and Peters entered the room. He flashed the torch over his prisoner.

"I don't think there'll be any harm in

me takin' a dollar or two," he muttered. "What's the use of money to a stiff? And you sure do look good and dead, young woman!" he chuckled as he bent down to begin the search.

"Guess again!"

Dorothy's bound feet shot upward with the force of a mainspring uncoiling. Her neck was braced against the wall and the whole strength of her thighs was behind the kick that drove her boot heels smashing under her captor's chin. The gangster sailed backward. His head hit the base of the opposite wall with a resounding crack and he lay like a log.

The electric torch trundled over the planks and came to a standstill, throwing its pencil of light across the floor. For a couple of seconds, Dorothy peered and listened. Then with intense exhilaration of spirit, she rolled and wriggled herself across the intervening space until she was underneath the window. Here, after a little straining and wobbling, that nearly cracked her sinews, she got on her knees. Then she heaved herself upright so that

she leaned sideways against the sash. With a thrust she drove her elbow through the pane. There was a crash and a tinkle of falling glass.

Two more thrusts shivered the pane until there remained only a fringe of broken glass at either side. Turning her back to it, she felt for the broken edge with her fingers and brought her rope-lashed wrists across it. Splintered window glass has an edge like a razor. Dorothy fumbled the cord blindly to the cutting edge, sawed steadily and felt one of the turns slacken and part.

It was enough. In a few seconds her wrists were free and she stooped and cast loose the lashings from her ankles. She staggered a little and collapsed on the floor. After chafing her arms and legs, she turned to attend to her companion.

There was no need. Mr. Peters showed no further sign of animation than a ham. To insure against interference or pursuit, Dorothy turned him over, untied a length of cord from her ankle-bonds, and cast a double sheet-bend about his wrists.

Picking up the flashlight, she hurried out through the door which that canny seeker of "pickings" had left open. She hurried along the two passages and down the rickety stairs. The door at the bottom was closed, so snapping off her light, she pulled it open and stepped into the yard.

But here she was certain there was no egress except by swimming unless she could find a way through the other side of the house. Somewhere out in the darkness she heard the lap and plash of water and the faint creak of rowlocks. Instantly she ducked behind a pile of empty barrels.

A boat skulled stealthily through the gloom and fetched up alongside the dock. A tall figure made the little craft fast, climbed the steps and peered around the yard.

At that very moment, a water rat dropped from the top of the wall to the ground by way of Dorothy's shoulder. It was impossible for her to suppress the exclamation of fright that escaped her.

The figure in the middle of the yard swung round and an electric torch flashed over the barrels.

"Come out of that or I'll shoot!" ordered the stranger. "And come out with your hands up!"

Chapter VIII

THE CORK CHAIN

With the white sabre of light blinding her vision, Dorothy walked out from behind the stack of barrels, hands above her head.

"*Dorothy!*" exclaimed the tall figure in astonishment. "What on earth are you doing here?"

There was an instant's pause; then Dorothy giggled.

"Gee, what a relief—but you scared me out of six years' growth, Bill Bolton!"

As her arms dropped to her sides, she staggered and would have fallen if Bill had not stepped quickly forward and placed his arm about her. He led her to an empty packing case and forced her to sit down. The surprise of this meeting coming as a climax to the strenuous events of the evening had just about downed her splendid nerves.

"Oh, Bill—" she sobbed hysterically on his shoulder—"you can't guess how glad I am to see you. I've really had an awful time of it tonight."

"Take it easy and have a good cry. Everything's all right now. You'll feel better in a minute," he soothed.

"What a crybaby you must think me," she said presently, in a limp voice. "Do you happen to have a handkerchief, Bill?"

"You bet. Here's one—and it's clean, too."

Dorothy dried her eyes and blew her nose rather violently.

"Thanks—I do feel much better now. Do you mind turning on the light again? I must be a sight. There—hold it so I can see in my compact."

Bill began to laugh as her deft fingers worked with powder, rouge and lipstick.

"What's the joke?" she asked, then answered her own question. "Oh, I know! You think girls do nothing but prink. Well, I don't care—it's horrid to look messy. Is there such a thing as a comb in your pocket, Bill? I have lost mine."

"Sorry," he grinned, "but I got my permanent last week. I don't bother to carry one any more."

"Don't be silly!" she began, then stopped short. "We've got to get out of here," she said and snapped her compact shut. "They are coming after me in a car. Donovan or Peters, I forget which, said so."

"Who are Donovan and Peters—and where are they going to take you?"

"Not that pair—other members of the same gang. D. and P. are two of the crew over at the beach cottage who chloroformed me, then tied me up and carted me over here in an open motor-sailor."

"Well, I'll be tarred and feathered!" Bill switched off his torch. "Here I've been following you for over two hours and never knew it *was* you! Never got a glimpse of your face, of course—took you for a man in that rig! Well, I'll be jiggered if that isn't a break!"

"So *you* were the man I thought I saw in the grass clump?"

"Sure. You led me to the house. I knew the gang had a cottage somewhere

along that beach, but I didn't know which one it was. By the way, I've got your *Mary Jane* tied to a mooring out yonder—Couldn't take a chance on running in closer. That old tub's engine has a bark that would wake George Washington."

Dorothy sprang to her feet. "That's great! We'll make for the *Mary Jane*, Bill, right now. If those men in the car catch us here there'll be another fight. Dorothy has had all the rough stuff she wants for one night, thank you!"

Bill took her arm.

"O.K. with me," he returned. "Think you're well enough to travel?"

"I'm all right. Hanging around this place gives me the jim-jams—let's go."

Together they crossed the yard and hurried along the narrow planking of the dock to the dinghy. Bill took the oars and a few minutes later they were safely aboard the motor boat. It began to rain again and the dark, oily water took on a vibrant, pebbly look.

"Come into the cabin," suggested Dorothy, watching Bill make the painter fast.

"We'll be drier there—and I've got about a million questions for you to answer."

"Go below, then. I'll join you in a minute."

Dorothy slid the cabin door open and dropped down on a locker. Presently Bill followed and took a seat opposite her.

"Better not light the lamp," he advised, "it's too risky now. By the way, Dorothy, I'm darn glad to see you again."

Dorothy smiled. "So'm I. I've missed you while you were away, and I sure do need your help now. Tell me—where in the wide world am I?"

"This tub is tied up to somebody else's mooring off the Babylon water front,—if that's any help to you."

"It certainly is. I hate to lose my bearings. Here's another: I don't suppose you happen to know what this is all about?"

Bill crossed his knees and leaned back comfortably.

"There's not much doubt in my mind, after tonight's doings. Those men in the beach cottage are diamond smugglers and no pikers at the game, take it from me!"

"Ooh!" Dorothy's eyes widened. "Diamonds, eh! That's beyond my wildest dreams. How do they smuggle them, Bill?"

"Well, these fellows have a new wrinkle to an old smuggling trick. Somebody aboard an ocean liner drops a string of little boxes, fastened together at long intervals—the accomplices follow the steamer in a boat and pick them up. And now, from what I've found out, there's every reason to believe that this gang are chucking their boxes overboard in the neighborhood of Fire Island Light."

Dorothy sat bold upright, her eyes snapping with excitement.

"Listen, Bill! Those men in the cottage—I heard them talking, you know—couldn't make anything out of their conversation then, but now I'm beginning to understand part of it."

"Didn't you tell me they were arguing against going somewhere—or meeting someone—in the fog?"

"That's right. It was the man they called Charlie—the one who'd been a

physician. Let me see. . . he said that there was a rotten sea running out by the light. That must mean the Fire Island Light! Then, listen to this. He was sure that by three o'clock the fog off the light would be thick enough to cut with a knife—and that they would probably miss her anyway!—Don't you see? 'Her' means the liner they are to meet off the Fire Island Light about three o'clock this morning!"

"Good work, Miss Dixon—" Bill nodded approvingly. "And that is where Donovan and Charlie headed for when they parked you with Peters," he supplemented. "On a bet, they're running their motor-sailor out to the light right now."

Dorothy glanced at the luminous dial of her wrist watch.

"It is just midnight. Think we have time to make it?"

"Gosh, that's an idea! But, look here, Dorothy—" Bill hesitated, then went on in a serious tone, "if we run out to the lightship and those two in the motor-sailor spot us, there's likely to be a fight."

Dorothy moved impatiently. "What of it?"

"Oh, I know—but you'll stand a mighty good chance of getting shot. This thing is a deadly business. They're sure to be armed. Now, listen to me. I'll row you ashore and meet you in Babylon after I've checked up on those guys."

Dorothy stood up and squeezing past Bill, opened the cabin door.

"And my reply to you is—*rats!*" she flung back at him. "Of course I'm going with you. There'll be no argument, please. Get busy and turn over that flywheel while I go forward and slip our mooring."

Bill made no answer, but with a resigned shrug, followed her out to the cockpit. They had known each other only a few months, but their acquaintance had been quite long enough to demonstrate that when Miss Dixon spoke in that tone of voice, she meant exactly what she said. Bill knew that nothing short of physical force would turn the girl from her project, so making the best of things as he found them, he started the engine.

Bill was heading the boat across the bay when Dorothy came aft again. She went inside the cabin and presently emerged with a thermos of hot coffee, some sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs.

"We may both get shot or drowned," she remarked philosophically, "but we needn't starve in the meantime."

"Happy thought!" Bill bit into a sandwich with relish. "One drowns much more comfortably after having dined."

"Hm! It would be a cold wet business, though. Doubly wet tonight." She looked at the black water pock-marked with raindrops and shook her head. "Hand me another sandwich, please. Then tell me how *you* came to be mixed up with this diamond smuggling gang, Bill."

By this time they were well on their way across Great South Bay toward the inlet. From the bows came the steady gurgle and chug of short choppy seas as the stiff old tub bucked them. Holding a straight course, the two by the wheel were able to make out the grey-white gleam of sand on Sexton Island.

"Well, it was like this," began Bill. "You remember the Winged Cartwheels.* Well that was a secret service job for the government."

"I know," nodded Dorothy.

"Well, as I was saying—because of that and some other business, Uncle Sam knew that I could pilot a plane. Six weeks ago I was called to Washington and told that an international gang of criminals were flooding this country with diamonds, stolen in Europe. What the officials didn't know was the method being used to smuggle them into this country. However, they said they had every reason to believe that the diamonds were dropped overboard from trans-Atlantic liners somewhere off the coast and picked up by the smugglers' planes at sea. My job was to go abroad and on the return trip, to keep my eyes peeled night and day for airplanes when we neared America."

"Did you go alone?"

"Yes, but I gathered that practically every liner coming over from Europe was being covered by a secret service operative.

* *See Bill Bolton and The Winged Cartwheels.*

I made a trip over and back without spotting a thing. On the second trip back, something happened."

"When was that?"

"Night before last. The liner I was aboard had just passed Fire Island lightship. I stood leaning over the rail on the port side and I saw half a dozen or more small boxes dropped out of a porthole. They seemed to be fastened together. Once in the water, they must have stretched out over a considerable distance. Of course, there are notices posted forbidding anyone to throw anything overboard: and there are watchmen on deck. But they can't very well prevent a person from unscrewing a porthole and shoving something out!"

"Did you report it?"

"You bet. The skipper knew why I was making the trip. We located the stateroom and found that it belonged to three perfectly harmless Y.M.C.A. workers who were peaceably eating their dinner at the time. Somebody slipped into their room and did the trick."

"Did you hear or see any plane?"

"I thought I heard a motor, but it didn't sound like the engine of a plane. I couldn't be sure."

"The motor-sailor, probably?"

"It looks like it, now. Well, to continue: I landed in New York and took the next train to Babylon. Then I got me a room in one of those summer cottages on the beach. I was out on the dunes for a prowl when the *Mary Jane* put in at that little cove. That in itself seemed suspicious, so I followed you to the house and saw Peters scrag you. Although, at the time I had no idea who you were. Then when they tied you up and went off with you in the motor-sailor, I knew for certain that some dirty work was on. So I beat it back to the cove and came along in this old tub."

Dorothy finished the last of the coffee.

"Did you see the amphibian tied up to the cottage dock?" she asked.

"Yes. It took off just before the motor sailor left."

"Just how do you figure that it comes into the picture?"

"I think these people have a lookout sta-

tioned farther up the coast—on Nantucket Island, perhaps. When a ship carrying diamonds is sighted off the Island, the lookout wires to the aviator or his boss and the plane flies over to let the men in the cottage know when to expect her off the lightship. Then when they pick up the loot, he flies back with it to their headquarters next day. Of course, I don't know how far wrong I am—"

"But he's been doing it every day for weeks, Bill—maybe longer. Surely they can't be smuggling diamonds every day in the week?"

"He probably carries over their provisions and keeps an eye on them generally. I don't know. What he is doing is only a guess, on my part, anyway."

Dorothy smothered a yawn. "Do you suppose the red flag those men spoke of is a signal of some kind?"

"Guess so. But look here, you're dead tired. I can run this tub by myself. Hop in the cabin and take a nap. I'll call you when we near the lightship."

"You must be sleepy, too."

"I'm not. I had an idea I might be up most of the night, so slept until late this afternoon. And after those sandwiches and the coffee, I feel like a million dollars. Beat it now and get a rest."

Dorothy yawned again and stretched the glistening wet arms of her slicker above her head.

"Promise to wake me in plenty of time?"

"Cross my heart—"

"Good night, then."

"Good night. Better turn in on the floor. We're going to run into a sea pretty soon. Those lockers are narrow. Once we strike the Atlantic swell you'll never be able to stay on one and sleep!"

"Thanks, partner, I'll take your advice." She turned and disappeared below.

Chapter IX

DEEP WATER

The ebb tide soon caught the *Mary Jane* in the suck of its swift current and the boat rushed seaward. Presently she struck the breakers and floundering through them like a wounded duck, commenced to rise and fall on the rhythmic ground swell.

Dorothy came out of the cabin rubbing the sleep from her eyes.

"You didn't take much of a rest," said Bill from his place at the wheel.

She yawned and caught at the cabin roof to steady herself.

"*Mary Jane's* gallop through the breakers woke me up. Sleeping on a hard floor isn't all it's cracked up to be —and the cabin was awfully stuffy."

"Are you as good a sailor as you are a sport?"

"I don't know much about this deep water stuff, but I've never been seasick.

Thought I might be if I stayed in there any longer, though."

"Feel badly now?"

"No, this fresh air is what I needed. Is that the lightship dead ahead? I just caught the glow."

"Yep. That's Fire Island Light. I wish this confounded drizzle would stop. The swell is getting bigger and shorter. Must be a breeze of wind not far to the east of us."

"D'you think we're in time, Bill?"

"Yes, I think so. The weather is probably thick farther out and up the coast, and the ship will be running at reduced speed. It's likely she'll be an hour or so late. There is a ship out yonder, but it's a tanker or a freighter."

"How do you know that?"

"Why, a liner would be showing deck and cabin lights. Here comes the breeze—out of the northeast."

"It's raining harder, too. Ugh! What a filthy night."

Bill nodded grimly in the darkness. "You said a mouthful. It'll be good and sloppy

out here in another hour or two. Jolly boating weather, I don't think! And we can't get back into the bay until daylight, I'm afraid."

The big boat continued to pound steadily seaward and before long the lightship was close abeam. Bill ran some distance outside it, then stopped the engine.

"No use wasting gas," he said, and emptied one of the five-gallon tins into the fuel tank.

He went into the cabin again and reappeared with two life preservers.

"It's lucky the law requires all sail and motor craft to carry these things. Better slip into one—I'll put on the other."

Dorothy lifted her eyebrows questioningly. "Think we're liable to get wrecked?"

"Nothing like that—but a life preserver is great stuff when it comes to stopping bullets."

"Gee, Bill, do you really expect a scrap? There isn't a sign of the motor-sailor yet."

"I know—but they're out here somewhere, just the same. Neither of us is

showing lights, so in this weather we're not likely to spot each other unless our boats get pretty close. And if they do, those hyenas won't hesitate to shoot! Here, let me give you a hand."

Having put on the life preservers over their dripping slickers, they sat down and waited. The wind was freshening. A strong, steady draft blew out of the northeast and it was gradually growing colder. The rain had turned into sleet, fine and driving, but not thick enough to entirely obscure the atmosphere.

"Good gracious, Bill—*sleet!* That's the limit, really—do you suppose we'll ever sight the ship through this?" Dorothy's tone was thoroughly disgusted.

"Oh, yes," he replied cheerfully, "this isn't so bad. Her masthead lights should have a visibility of two or three miles, at least."

Dorothy said nothing, but, hands thrust deep into her pockets and with shoulders hunched, she stared moodily out to sea.

For about an hour they drifted, the broad-beamed motor boat wallowing in

the chop which crossed the ground swell. Twice Bill started the motor and worked back to their original position. He did not like the look of things, but said nothing to Dorothy about it. The wind grew stronger and seemed to promise a gale. The low tide with the line of breakers across the mouth of the inlet would effectually bar their entrance to Great South Bay for the next ten hours. And he doubted if they would have enough fuel for the run of nearly fifty miles to the shelter of Gravesend Bay.

Then as they floundered about, he heard the distant, muffled bellow of a big ship's foghorn. Again it sounded; and twice more, each time coming closer. Bill started the engine and headed cautiously out in the direction from whence it came.

Suddenly there sounded a blast startlingly close to the *Mary Jane*. This was answered from the lightship, and through the flying scud and sleet they saw a vivid glare. Bill put his helm hard over and when the steamer had passed about four hundred yards away, he turned the motor

boat again to cut across the liner's wake. Faint streams of music reached their ears emphasizing the dreariness of their position.

Directly they were astern of the great ship, he swung the *Mary Jane* into the steamer's course. Running straight before the wind, it was easy to follow the sudsy brine that eddied in her wake. He was by no means certain, however, that he could keep the dull glow of her taffrail light in sight. That depended upon the liner's speed, which might be more than the *Mary Jane* could develop. But he soon discovered he had either underestimated the power of the motor boat or, what was more probable, the steamer had reduced her own. Before long he was obliged to slow down to keep from overhauling.

And so for nearly an hour they tagged along, astern, keeping a sharp lookout on the band of swirling water. Little by little their spirits sank, as no floating object appeared to reward their perseverance. The weather was becoming worse and worse, but the sea was not troublesome; partly be-

cause the *Mary Jane* was running before it and partly because the great bulk of the liner ahead flattened it out in her displacement.

"If this keeps on much longer, we're going to run short of gas," said Dorothy, still peering ahead. "Any idea how long it *will* keep up?"

Bill shrugged and swung the boat's head over a point.

"Not the dimmest. I'm beginning to wonder if we'll have to follow her all the way to the pilot station and then cut across for Gravesend Bay."

"We'll sure be out of luck if we run out of fuel with this wind backing into the northwest. It will blow us clean out to sea!"

"Take the wheel!" said Bill abruptly. "I'm going to see where we stand."

Dorothy, with her hands on the spokes, saw him measure the gasoline in the tank and then shake his head.

"How about it?" she called.

"Not so good," he growled, and poured in the contents of another tin. "This en-

gine is powerful, but when you say it's primitive, you only tell the half of it. The darn thing laps up gas like a—"

"Bill!" Dorothy raised her arm—"there's another motor boat ahead!"

Both of them stared forward into the gloom. For a moment Bill could see nothing but the seething waters and the faint glimmer of the liner's taffrail light. Then in an eddy of the driving sleet he caught a glimpse of a dark bulk rising on a swell a couple of hundred yards ahead. At the same time they both heard the whir of a rapidly revolving motor distinctly audible between the staccato barks of their own exhaust.

"The motor-sailor, Bill!"

"Sure to be. It must have cut in close under the steamer's stern. Let me take the wheel again, Dorothy."

"O. K. Do you think they've seen us?"

"Not likely. They'll be watching the ship and her wake. To see us, they'd have to stare straight into the teeth of the wind and this blinding sleet."

"But they'll hear us, anyway?"

"Not a chance. That motor sailor's got one of those fast-turning jump-spark engines. They run with a steady rattle. There's no interval between coughs. Ours are more widely punctuated. Anyhow, that's the way I dope it. They've probably signaled the ship by this time, and the contraband ought to be dropped from a cabin port at any time now."

"Got a plan?"

"I think I have."

He gave the boat full gas, then a couple of spokes of the wheel sheered her off to starboard.

"What's that for?" Dorothy thought he had decided to give up the attempt. "Not quitting, are we?"

"What do you take me for? Get out that gun of yours and use your wits. I'm goin' to loop that craft and bear down on them from abeam. If they beat it, O. K. If they don't, we'll take a chance on crashing them!"

"You tell 'em, boy!" Dorothy had caught his excitement. "If they shoot, I'll fire at the flashes!"

Bill was working out his plan in detail and did not reply. He felt sure his scheme was sound. The *Mary Jane* was heavily built, broad of beam, with bluff bows and low freeboard. The motor-sailor was a staunch craft, too, but she was not decked and with a load of but two men aboard she would have no great stability. He was certain that if he could work out and make his turn so as to bear down upon her from a little forward of the beam, striking her amidships with the swell of his starboard bow, she would crack like an egg.

Bill did not dare risk a head-on ram. That might capsize them both. To cut into her broadside at the speed she was making would possibly tear off or open up his own bows. The *Mary Jane* must strike her a heavy but a glancing blow at an angle of about forty-five degrees. Such a collision meant taking a big chance with their own boat. But the *Mary Jane* was half-decked forward and the flare of her run would take the shock on the level of her sheer strake.

Quickly he explained his project.

"I'm taking a chance, of course, if I don't hit her right," he finished.

"Go ahead—" she flung back. "I'm all for it!"

Bill grinned at her enthusiasm, and with the engine running full, he started to edge off and work ahead. But he could not help being impatient at the thought that the contraband migh be dropped at any minute and hooked up by the others. He took too close a turn. As the *Mary Jane* hauled abreast about two hundred yards ahead, the smugglers sighted them. Their motor-sailor swerved sharply to port, and with a sudden acceleration, it dived into the gloom and was lost to sight.

"Bluffed off!" he shouted triumphantly.

He turned the wheel and was swinging back into the liner's wake when Dorothy gave a cry and pointed to the water off their port quarter.

"Look! There! *There!*" she screamed.

Staring in the same direction, Bill saw what at first he took to be a number of small puffs of spume. Then he saw that they were rectangular. The *Mary Jane* had

already passed them and a second later they disappeared from view.

Bill nearly twisted off the wheel in an effort to put about immediately. The result was to slow down and nearly stop their heavy boat. Gradually the *Mary Jane* answered her helm and presently they were headed back in the ship's path.

And then as the *Mary Jane* was again gathering speed, the motor sailor came slipping out of the smother headed straight for the contraband, her broadside presented toward her pursuers.

"Stand by for a ram!" yelled Bill and pulled out his automatic.

Not fifty yards separated the two boats. Bows to the gale, the *Mary Jane* bore down on the motor sailor. If those aboard her realized their danger, they had no time to dodge, to shoot ahead, or avoid the ram by going hard astern. They swerved and the *Mary Jane* struck full amidships with a fearful grinding crash.

Bill caught a glimpse of two figures and saw the flame streak out from their barking guns. He felt a violent tug at his life

preserver. Then a yell rang out and the two boats ground together in the heave of the angry sea.

Steadying himself with a hand on the wheel, he reversed and his boat hauled away. As she backed off he heard the choking cough of the other craft which had now been blotted out by the darkness and driving sleet.

Bill turned about with a triumphant cry on his lips, then checked it suddenly as he saw that Dorothy had fallen across the coaming and was lying halfway out of the boat.

Chapter X

WRECKED

The engine gave a grunt and stopped. But Bill scarcely noticed it. Hauling desperately to get Dorothy inboard, he thought his heart would burst. Suddenly he heard her cry:

"Don't pull! Just hold me by my legs."

She squirmed farther across the coaming and he gripped her by the knees.

"That's it," she panted. "There—I've got it! Now haul me in."

Bill gave a heave and just then the boat, caught by a huge wave, rolled far over and landed Bill on his back with Dorothy sprawled across him. As they struggled to their feet he saw that she was laughing.

"Aren't you hurt at all?" he asked, rubbing a bruised elbow.

"Only—out of—breath," she gasped. "They—are all—fastened together. Haul them in."

Glancing down, he saw that she was holding one of the white boxes toward him. He made no motion to take it, but stared to windward, listening.

Dorothy could hear nothing but the wind and the waves and the swirling sleet.

"What is it?" she jerked out, striving to regain her breath.

"Wait a minute." Suddenly Bill snatched up his electric torch and dove into the cabin.

Dorothy dropped down on a thwart with the box in her hand. After a short rest, she renewed her endeavors to get the remainder of her haul overside. When Bill clambered out of the cabin she was tugging at the strong line to which the boxes were tied.

"It's jammed, or caught, or something," she announced.

Bill looked overside.

"Yes, dash it all!" he growled. "We fouled the line and wound it round the tail shaft when I backed off just now. That's what stopped the motor, of course. Let me see what I can do. You're blown."

He picked up another box bobbing alongside and started to haul in the line. One end of this he found was jammed under the stern, while on the other length a box appeared every thirty or forty feet.

"Ten, in all," he told her and drew the last aboard.

"Hooray! We've done it!" cried Dorothy exultantly.

"We sure have. You just said it all—" His tone was sarcastic. "The boat is leaking like a sieve. That lateral wrench started it. The propeller's jammed. It's beginning to blow a gale and there isn't enough gas to run us out of it. Three cheers and a tiger! Also, hooray!"

Dorothy's enthusiasm evaporated. "Gee, I'm sorry. I'm always such a blooming optimist—I didn't think about our real difficulties."

"O. K. kid. I apologize for being cross. That water in the cabin kind of got me for the moment. Let's see what it looks like here."

He wrenched up the flooring and flashed his torch.

Dorothy gave a gasp of dismay. The boat was filling rapidly.

"I'll get that bucket from the cabin," she said at once.

"Good girl! I've just got to get this coffee mill grinding again, or we'll be out of luck good and plenty."

Dorothy fetched the bucket and began to bail. She saw that Bill was trying to start the engine.

"The shaft wound up that line while we were going astern," he explained. "It ought to unreel if I can send the old tub ahead."

Switching on the current, he managed to get a revolution or two. Then the motor stopped firing.

"No go?" inquired Dorothy.

"Not a chance!"

He ripped off his life preserver and slipping out of his rubber coat, pulled forth a jack-knife and opened it.

"What are you going to do?" Dorothy paused in her bailing.

"Get overboard and try to cut us loose. Don't stop! Keep at it for all you're

worth. It's our only chance of safety!"

Wielding her bucket in feverish haste, she watched Bill lower himself over the stern. The water pounded by this unseasonable sleet must be freezingly cold. She wished it were possible to help him. Fortunately, the *Mary Jane* was light of draft. He would not have to get his head under, but that tough line must be twisted and plaited and hard as wire. What if his knife broke, or slipped from his numbed fingers? Dorothy shuddered. Meanwhile, the storm was getting worse and the heavy boat drifted before it.

"Hey, there, Dorothy! Give me a hand up!"

She dropped the bucket and sprang to his assistance. Then, as his head came in sight, she leaned over and gripping him under the arms, swung him over the stern.

"My word—your strength's inhuman—" he panted.

"Don't talk nonsense. Get busy and start the engine. The water's gaining fast.

"Confound!" he exclaimed. "I'd no idea the cockpit flooring was awash. An-

other six inches and it will reach the carburetor."

While Bill talked he was priming the cylinder. A heave of the crank and the motor started with a roar. Then he flashed his light on the compass and after noting the bearing of the wind, laid the *Mary Jane* abeam it.

"Take the wheel," he said to Dorothy. "And steer just as we're heading now."

"What about the bailing, Bill?"

"My job. You've had enough of it."

"But I'm not tired—"

"Don't argue with the skipper!"

"But you're soaked to the skin!"

"Of course I am—what I need is exercise—I'm freezing!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry—here—turn over the wheel, skipper."

Dorothy grabbed the spokes and Bill hastily slipped into his rubber coat and adjusted the life belt over it.

"How are we headed?" she inquired. "I can't see the compass without a light."

"Straight for shore, and we'll be lucky if the old tub stays afloat that long. The

whole Atlantic Ocean's pouring in through her seams."

"Maybe the pump would be better?"

"No-sir: not that pump. I've seen it!"

"Mmm. That's why I chose the bucket. Say, I hope you won't get a chill."

"I'll hope with you," returned Bill and kept his remaining breath for his labors.

A heavy wave broke against the *Mary Jane's* bow and swept them both with a deluge of water. Dorothy paid off the boat's head half a point.

"Lucky that didn't stall the motor for good and all," she observed grimly, "one more like it, and we'll be swimming."

"Tide's on the ebb," grunted Bill. "Wind's barking around—it'll be blowing off the land in half an hour, I guess."

"Do you think the old tub will last that long? She's getting terribly sluggish. Steers like a truck in a swamp!"

"Listen!" he cried. "There's your answer."

From somewhere ahead came the unmistakable booming roar of breakers. As they topped the next wave Dorothy saw a

white band on the sea. She steadied the wheel with her knee and tightened her life preserver. She knew they could not hope to reach the beach in the *Mary Jane*. Low and open as she was, the first line of breakers would fill her. The motor was still pounding away when she leaned forward and raised her voice to a shout.

"Stop bailing, Bill! Stand by to swim for it!"

"O. K., kid."

Bill dropped the bucket and dove for the cabin. A second later he was back in the cockpit with a three fathom length which he had cut from the anchor line. He fastened one end about Dorothy's waist and took a turn about his own body with the other. Then, catching up a bight of the line which secured the boxes he made it fast to his belt with a slip hitch.

The *Mary Jane* was forging strongly ahead, her actual weight of water being about that of her customary load of passengers. The swells began to mount, to topple. Searching the shore, Dorothy could see no sign of any light or habitation.

"If I'd known we were so nearly in, we might have raised the coast guard with the flash light." Bill groaned his self-contempt. "I ought to have kept an eye out—and the Navy said I was a seaman!"

"Don't be silly! It was my fault, if anyone's. You were busy bailing. Chances are the light couldn't have been seen from shore, anyway. Gosh, what weather! Who ever heard of sleet in August!"

"Look out—behind you!" yelled Bill.

A moment later she felt herself snatched from the wheel and was crouching below the bulwark with Bill's arm around her waist. Then as a brimming swell lifted them sluggishly, its combing crest washed into the boat. The next wave flung them forward and crumpled over the gunwale.

The *Mary Jane's* motor gave a strangled cough and stopped. The boat yawed off and came broadside on her stern upon a line with the beach.

"This is what I hoped for," he shouted in her ear. "Gives us a chance to get clear."

She saw him gather up the boxes and fling them overboard.

"Keep close to me. We'll need each other in the undertow!" she yelled back at him, as he pulled her to her feet.

Then as the next big comber mounted and curled, they dove into the driving water and the wave crashed down upon the sinking boat. Dorothy felt her body being whirled over and over, sucked back a little and driven ahead again. The water was paralyzingly cold, but she struck out strongly and with bursting lungs reached the surface. A second later, Bill's head bobbed up a couple of yards away. Blowing the water from her nose, she saw they were being washed shoreward. Her life preserver, new and buoyant, floated her well—almost too well. She found it difficult to dive beneath the curling wave-crests to prevent another rolling.

Bill was swimming beside her now and as a great wave caught them up and carried them forward he grasped her under the arm.

There came a last crumbling surge and the mighty swirl of water swept them up the beach and their feet struck bottom.

Fortunately, the beach was not steep. The tide was nearly at the last of the ebb and there was but little undertow. Together they waded out and staggered up the shingle to sink down on the sand breathing heavily.

The boxes were washing back and forth at the water's edge and Bill's first act was to haul them in.

"Well, the government's precious loot is safe," he said grimly. "Are you able to walk?"

"I—I guess so."

"Then, let's get going. We'll freeze if we don't."

He gathered up the boxes and looped them from his shoulders, rose to his feet and held out a hand. Dorothy took it, scrambled up and stood for a moment swaying unsteadily.

"The end of a perfect d-day—" she tried to grin, her teeth chattering with cold.

"I *don't* think!" replied Bill unenthusiastically, and helped her to get rid of the heavy life belt.

"Know where we are?" she inquired

when he had dropped the belts on the sand.

"Not precisely. But if we keep going we ought to strike a lifesaving station or something—come on."

Dorothy groaned. "I suppose I must, but—gee whiz—I sure want to rest."

Bill, who knew that physical exertion was absolutely necessary now, got his arm about her and they started unsteadily down the beach assisted by the gale at their backs.

They had walked about half a mile when he felt her weight begin to increase and her steps to lag. He stopped and peered into her face. As he did so, she sank to the sand at his feet. Bending over her, he was surprised to see that she was asleep—utterly exhausted.

The outlook was anything but pleasant. They had apparently struck upon a wild and desolate strip of sand—an island, he thought, cut off by inlets at either end and flanked by the maze of marshes in the lower reaches of Great South Bay. Without doubt they were marooned and to make matters worse, Bill knew he had just about reached the limit of his own strength.

Chapter XI

FROM OUT THE SEA

Bill stared down at Dorothy sleeping the sleep of exhaustion on the cold, wet sand. Her clothes, like his, were soaked with sea water and with rain. He realized that something must be done at once, or they would both be in for pneumonia. So stripping off his rubber coat and covering the unconscious girl, he started for the dunes.

Day was breaking as he left the shingle and commenced to plow through the loose sand. The storm was abating somewhat. Although the wind still blew half a gale, the sleet had turned to a fine, cold rain which bade fair to stop altogether once the sun was fully up. By the time Bill Bolton worked his painfully slow way to the top of the dunes it was light enough to see for a considerable distance.

At first glance the prospect was anything but alluring. His point of vantage

was in the approximate center of an island of sand and shingle, a mile long, perhaps, by half a mile wide. Inlets from the white-capped Atlantic effectually cut off escape at either end of the outer beach on which a fearsome surf was pounding. Along the inner shore of this desolate, wind-swept islet a complicated network of channels intertwined about still other islands as far as the eye would reach. Nor could Bill make out any sign of human habitation.

"Water, water, everywhere, and not a gol-darned drop to drink," he misquoted thoughtfully and wondered if by chewing the eel grass he would be able to get rid of the parched feeling of his mouth and throat.

He pulled a broad blade and chewed it meditatively. Then spat it out in disgust. The grass was as salty as the sea. It made him thirstier than ever. Turning seaward he swept the pale horizon with a despondent gaze.

Not a sign of a craft of any description could be seen. Wait a minute, though. Bill caught his breath. What was that—bobbing in the chop of the waves, just out-

side the bar of the eastern inlet? Could it be a boat? In this gray light a proper focus was difficult. It was a boat, open; a lifeboat, by the look of it. Waiting no longer for speculation, he hurried down the low hill toward the sea.

Once he struck hard sand, Bill raced into the teeth of the wind, with the boom of the surf on his right, and dire necessity lending wings to his tired feet. Forgotten were his thirst, the clammy cold of his wet clothes and his weariness. Every ounce of strength, the entire power of his will centered in the effort to come close enough to the boat to signal her assistance.

With his heart pumping like a steam engine, he passed Dorothy, who was lying exactly as he had left her. Then he got his second wind and running became less of a painful struggle. He could see the boat more plainly now. Surely it was an open motor-sailor. Could it be the one belonging to Donovan and Charlie, he wondered. What irony!—to be rescued by the smugglers—and to lose liberty and the diamonds after all this storm and stress!

But the motor sailor was drifting—into the surf off the bar—without a soul aboard.

Coming to a halt at the inlet, he watched the tide pull the boat through the breakers on the bar to the smooth water. Off came his jacket and flinging it behind him on to the sand he waded into the water and swam for the boat. He reached her at last and with difficulty pulled himself aboard.

For a moment or two he rested on a thwart in a state of semi-collapse. As he had thought, it was the smugglers' boat. But there was no sign of Donovan or Charlie. However, except for six inches or so of water that sloshed about his feet, the motor sailor seemed to be in good condition.

When he felt better, he started the engine and ran her ashore on the island. Then after inspecting the boat's lockers, he buried her anchor in the sand and trudged back along the beach to Dorothy.

She was still sleeping, touseled head pillowed on her right arm, and it was some time before he could bring her back to consciousness.

"Let me alone," she moaned drowsily, "I'm too tired to get up this morning, Lizzie. I don't want any breakfast—go away and let me sleep!"

Bill raised her to a sitting position. "Wake up—wake up! You aren't at home. And this isn't Lizzie—it's Bill—Bill Bolton! We're still on the island."

Dorothy opened her eyes, and looked at him wonderingly.

"The island—" he reiterated. "We were wrecked—had to swim for it. Don't you remember?"

Suddenly she gained full control of her waking senses.

"I know. I know now, Bill. Guess I've been asleep. Ugh! I'm soaking. What did you wake me for? At least, I was comfortable!"

"Come to breakfast and dry clothes. You'll get pneumonia if you stay here. Do you think you can walk? You're a pretty husky armful, but I guess I can carry you to the boat if I must." He grinned at her.

Dorothy was stiff and weary but she fairly jumped to her feet.

"What boat? Where is it?"

Bill told her.

"But you said 'dry clothes and breakfast'—"

They were hurrying along the beach.

"That's right. She's got plenty of food aboard—and one of the lockers is packed with clothes. There are even dry towels, think of that! Those guys had her provisioned and equipped for a long trip."

"What's happened to them, do you think?"

"I can't make it out. The boat has shipped some water, but nothing to be worried about. The motor's O.K. and there's plenty of gas. They may have got into the surf, thought she was going to founder, perhaps, and swam ashore like we did."

"But they're not on the island?"

"No. If they made the beach, it was somewhere else along the coast."

"We should worry," said Dorothy. "If they don't want her, we do—and she certainly looks good to me."

They walked down the shingle and Bill got aboard the boat.

"You wait on the beach," he directed. "It's pretty wet underfoot. I'll pass the things overside. I think the best plan is for you to go up in the dunes and change there. Meanwhile, I'll start in with the handpump and get rid of the water. I'll have her good and dry by the time you get back. Then you can rustle a meal while I put on dry things. Catch!"

Dorothy found herself possessed of a bundle knotted in a large bath towel. Upon inspection it proved to contain dungaree trousers, a jumper, a dark blue sweater, woolen socks and a pair of rubber-soled shoes.

"They may be a trifle large," said Bill. "But at least they're dry and the clothes seem to be clean."

"Nothing could be sweeter," was Dorothy's comment. "See you in ten minutes—so long!"

"O.K.," replied Bill and turned to the handpump.

Quarter of an hour later he was completing his labors with the aid of a large sponge when he heard footsteps on the

shingle and looked up to see a young fellow in blue dungarees and sweater coming toward the boat, carrying a bundle of clothes.

"Dorothy! Gee—what a change! For a minute I thought you were a stranger."

"Somebody's younger brother, I suppose," she laughed. "These things are miles too big for me—but they're darned comfortable and warm. You go ahead and change your own clothes. I'll finish bailing."

Bill stepped overside and on to the sand, carrying his dry rig and a towel. Dorothy was spreading her sodden clothing on the sand.

"Bailing's over for today," he told her, "don't forget about breakfast, though. I could eat a raw whale."

"Don't worry, young feller," she retorted. "Your breakfast will be ready before you are. Just let me get these things drying in the nice warm sun that's coming up now, and you'll see!"

With a wave of his hand he disappeared over the brow of the sand hills, and

Dorothy clambered aboard the beached motorsailor. Much to her delight she found a small two-burner oil stove, already lighted, standing on a thwart. Nearby had been placed a coffee-pot and a large frying pan. The lid of the food locker lay open, as did the one containing the water keg.

"Bright boy," she murmured approvingly. "You're a real help to mother! Now let's see what smugglers live on."

She had set a collapsible table that hinged to the side of the boat and was busy at the stove when she heard Bill's halloo.

"Breakfast ready?" he called from the beach.

"Will be in a jiffy," she answered without looking up. "How do you like your eggs?"

"Sunny side up, if it's all the same to you."

"O.K. Spread your wet clothes on the sand and come aboard."

She was serving his eggs on a hot plate when Bill's head appeared over the side.

"My, but that coffee smells good," he

cried, and swung himself aboard. "How did you manage to cook all that food!"

"Come to the table, and see what we've got."

He sat down and inspected the various edibles, ticking them off on his fingers.

"Coffee, condensed milk, bread and butter, the ham-what-am, fried eggs, marmalade and maple syrup! Say, Dorothy, those guys certainly lived high. Some meal, this!"

Dorothy turned about from the stove, smiling. "And here's what goes with the maple syrup!"

"A stack of wheats!" He shouted as she uncovered the dish. "You're a wonder, a magician, Dorothy. How in the world did you manage it?"

Dorothy laughed, pleased by his enthusiasm.

"Found a package of pancake flour in the locker. They're simple enough to make. Now dig in before things get cold. Help yourself to butter—it's rather soft, but this lugger doesn't seem to run to ice."

Bill set to work as she poured the coffee.

"Like it that way," he replied, his mouth full of ham and eggs, while he plastered his pancakes with butter. "Well, we've sure put it over on Messrs. Donovan and Charlie this trip, not to mention your friend Peters. Got their diamonds and their boat and their clothes. Now we're eating their breakfast,—the sun is shining once more—and all is right in the world."

"Where are those diamonds, by the way?" exclaimed Dorothy suddenly, having taken the edge off her ravenous appetite.

Bill laid down his knife and fork. For a moment he looked startled, then burst into a great roar of laughter.

"We're a fine pair of secret service workers!" he cried derisively. "But it's my fault. You were all in."

"Dorothy's jaw dropped. "Don't tell me you left them on the beach!"

"Surest thing you know. I left them beside you on the sand and forgot all about the darn things when I spotted the motor sailor. Never thought of them again until this minute!"

Dorothy nodded sagely. "Which only goes to show that diamonds don't count for much when one is tired and wet and hungry, not to mention being marooned on a desert island!"

"Ain't it the truth! Another cup of coffee, please. I'll fetch them when we've finished eating."

"After we've washed up?"

"O.K. with me."

Bill drank his third cup of coffee and leaned back with a sigh of content.

"Well, the old appetite's satisfied at last," he admitted comfortably. "And I don't mind telling you that was the best meal I ever ate."

"Thank you, kind sir. Though I think it is your appetite rather than the cook you should thank."

Bill shook his head. "When it comes to cooking, you're a real, bona fide, died-in-the-wool, A-1 Ace! How about it— shall we wash the dishes now?"

"I can't eat any more, and if I don't get busy soon, I'll go to sleep again."

"Pass the dishes and things overside to

me. I'll sluice 'em off in the water. We should worry. This will be our last meal on this boat. I'll bet a rubber nickel those smuggler-guys wouldn't have done this much if they'd got the *Mary Jane.*"

"Poor *Mary Jane,*" sighed Dorothy as they tidied up. "She was a staunch old thing. I wonder what Yancy will soak Dad for her?"

"Nothing. Uncle Sam pays for that boat. She went down on government service, didn't she?"

"That's good news," smiled Dorothy. "Now, that's the last plate. Let's go along the beach. I'm getting worried about those boxes of diamonds. Do you think they'll be there, all right?"

"Sure to be. Unless somebody has landed on this island while we were busy with the eats. Come along and we'll see."

Chapter XII

THE NOTEBOOK

"Do you really think they'll be where we left them, Bill?"

"Why sure! You're not worrying, are you?"

The two were hurrying along the beach toward the spot where Dorothy had dropped to the sand and fallen asleep.

"Yes, I am."

"Well, it's Uncle Sam's loot, not ours. And I reckon he cares more about knowing how the smuggling was done than the contraband itself, anyway."

"I know. But that's only half of it. The gang has got to be rounded up. We don't know where they have their headquarters or who is in back of this business. So I'd hate to have to admit I'd lost the diamonds, after all." Then, as Bill began to reply, she went on: "And don't forget that Terry Walters is still missing—or was, when I

flew over from New Canaan yesterday!"

"You're right, pal. I just didn't want you to take it too soberly. But that bearded aviator has got to be checked up. No easy matter, either, after what happened last night." He broke off sharply. "There are the old boxes—just where I dropped them—so you see you've had your worry for nothing."

"Just the same, we've been terribly careless!"

"Don't rub it in," said Bill, looping the line and its dangling load over his shoulder. "These things go to a bank for safe keeping just as soon as I can get rid of them."

Dorothy caught his arm. Let's pry open one of the boxes, and make sure there really are diamonds inside."

"Nothing doing," Bill answered decisively. "They're going to be turned over to the authorities—as is!"

"Well, you needn't be so snooty about it. But I am crazy to see the sparklers—especially after all we've been through to rescue them!"

"Of course,—I'm sorry," apologized Bill with a grin, "I'm kind of jumpy this morning, I guess. Me for bed as soon as I can find one. But you know, we really can't open those things up, because we'd then be held responsible for contents—or no contents—as the case may be. See?"

"I didn't think about that, Bill. But let's forget the old boxes. I'm all in myself. Any idea what time it is? My watch has stopped."

Bill glanced at his wrist. "Just seven o'clock. Seems like noon to me. This nice warm sun is a wonderful help—I was chilled to the bone."

"Me too," said Dorothy. "Well, here we are at the motor sailor. Nothing to keep us longer on this island. I vote we shove off."

"Second the motion. Hop aboard and go aft. Your weight in the stern will help to raise her bow so I can push her out without breaking my back."

"How's that?" called Dorothy a minute later.

"Fine! Stand by for a shove!"

A heave of his shoulder against the bow loosened the boat's keel from the sand and Bill sprang aboard as she glided into deep water.

"Don't suppose there's a chart of the lower bay stowed in one of those lockers?" he remarked as he started the engine. "The shallows are going to be the limit to navigate without running aground. Do you mind seeing what you can find, Dorothy?"

"Not at all—seeing I've already found one," she laughed. "Came across it when I was looking for food."

"Good." Bill took over the wheel. "Let me see it, will you?"

Dorothy passed over the map. Bill studied it with a hand on the wheel.

"Thank goodness the deeper channels are marked," he ruminated, "that's a help, anyway."

Dorothy peered over his shoulder.

"That island must be one of those in Jones Inlet. I had no idea we'd gone so far west."

"All of fifteen miles as a plane flies to Babylon. No chance of making any time

until we get into South Oyster Bay which is really the western end of Great South Bay. If we make Babylon by noon, we'll be lucky."

"No reason why we should both try to keep awake," observed Dorothy. "I'll skipper this craft for a spell. Make yourself comfortable somewhere and go to sleep. You'll be called at ten o'clock."

"But you need rest more than I do," began Bill.

"Oh, I had a snooze on the *Mary Jane*," she interrupted, "and got another on the sand this morning. Pipe down, sailor! This is your master's voice what's speaking. Excuse the ungarnished truth, but you look like something the cat brought in and didn't want!"

Bill's laugh ended in a yawn.

"Aye, aye, skipper. Call me at four bells. Night!"

He went forward and lay flat on the flooring, his head pillowed on his arms. He was asleep almost immediately.

For the next couple of hours Dorothy steered a winding course among low sandy

islands and mudbanks. It was impossible to make any speed in these shallow, tortuous waters and she was taking no chances on running aground. It was monotonous work at best. She was deadly tired. There was little or no breeze and the sun, unshaded by the faintest wisp of cloud, fairly blistered the boat's paint with its fierce heat.

At ten she roused Bill, and as soon as he was sufficiently alert to take over she went to sleep on the flooring in the shadow of a thwart.

It seemed as though she had but closed her eyes when Bill's voice called her back to wakefulness.

"We're almost in," he reminded her. "Better run forward or I'm likely to ram the dock."

Dorothy jumped to her feet and ran her fingers through her rumpled hair. She was astonished to see that the motor sailor was closing in on the dock of Yancy's Motor Boat garage.

"We must have made wonderful time—" she yawned, stumbling toward the bow.

"Only fair," Bill said. "It's almost noon. Snap into it, kid, and fend her off with the boathook."

Presently they were tied up to the dock and Dorothy was making a sketchy toilet with the aid of her compact.

"How about it, old sport?" she looked up from her mirror, busy with damp powder and lipstick. "What's on the program now? Thank goodness *Wispy* is still at her mooring over there. I s'pose after we settle with Yancy for the *Mary Jane,* we'd better take the plane and fly home."

"Eventually, yes," decided Bill. "I'll go up to the office and fix things with Yancy. I've got to do some long distance telephoning, anyway, and park these boxes in a bank. It will save a lot of time if you'll go over this boat with a fine tooth comb while I'm gone. I don't expect you'll find anything much, but there's no telling."

"All right," she nodded. "And while you're about it, get hold of that letter I wrote Mr. Walters and phone Lizzy we will be home for a late lunch. The sooner

we can get back to New Canaan and Little Dorothy can crawl between clean sheets, the better she'll be pleased!"

"Yep. I'll work as fast as I can."

Bill clambered on to the dock and made off in the direction of the boat yard.

For the next hour Dorothy worked manfully, overhauling the motor sailor. Fierce rays of the noonday sun beat down on the open boat. She was worn out and dizzy, but stuck pluckily to her job, turning out the contents of lockers and investigating every nook and cranny of the smugglers' craft. Except for an old coat and those odds and ends which accumulate aboard any boat as large as the motor sailor, she found absolutely nothing. Tired and hot and crazy for sleep, she decided to call off this unprofitable search, when Bill's voice hailed her.

"Hello, there, pardner," he sang out, stepping aboard. "How are things going?"

Dorothy straightened her back and wiped the perspiration from her forehead with a sodden handkerchief. She noted

the deep circles below Bill's eyes and the tired droop of his shoulders. He looked on the verge of collapse, but his voice still held its hearty ring.

"Not so good, old timer. There isn't a blessed thing worth while aboard this scow. Finish your business?"

"Reckon so. Got Washington on the phone and the big chief is tickled silly with all we've done. Tell you more about it later. Yancy will be recompensed for the *Mary Jane* and will look after this motor sailor until the government men take her over. I got Lizzie on the wire. She expects your father home tonight."

"Thanks. Did you get my letter, too?"

"It's in my pocket. I put the diamonds in a safe deposit box at a bank uptown. And I guess that's pretty much everything."

"You look done up, Bill."

"I've felt sprucer. But you look pretty rocky yourself."

"Feel like a wet smack, thank you. The heat is terrible."

"Wait till I collect my duds and yours,"

he suggested, "and we'll beat it for New Canaan and Home Sweet Home!"

"They're rolled up in a sea bag," she told him. "Here it is."

She started toward him with the bag in her arms, stumbled and would have fallen had not Bill's steadying hand prevented.

"Kind o' wobbly, eh?"

"Not as bad as all that, Bill. Caught my toe in that floorboard. It's loose."

"Have you had them up?"

"Why, no, I never thought of that."

Bill took the sea bag from her and tossed it on to the dock.

"Hop on a thwart," he prompted. "I don't suppose there's anything but bilge-water under the boards but we might as well have a look."

"Need a hand?" asked Dorothy, looking down at him.

"No, I guess not. These sections aren't heavy—" He broke off with a sudden exclamation and fished up something from the wet.

"What is it?"

"Seems to be a notebook. Probably dropped out of either Donovan's or Charlie's pockets and got kicked under that loose flooring in the gale last night. But it's soaking wet and its pages are stuck together. Wonder if we'll be able to get anything out of it?"

Dorothy held out her hand.

"Give it to me. I'll dry it out on the dock while you look some more."

For the next few minutes Bill continued his search while Dorothy after placing the notebook on the decking of the dock watched it carefully, lest the light breeze blow it into the water.

At last he joined her and lifted the sea bag over his shoulder.

"How's it coming?"

"Not so good. It's going to take a long time to dry the book all the way through even in this sun."

"Then let's take it along to New Canaan. I'll get Dad to put it in our oven as soon as we get home. That'll do the trick. Get aboard that dinghy and I'll row you over to the plane."

Dorothy picked up the notebook and slipped it into her pocket.

"That's the best thing you've said today," she beamed, "I'll be home and asleep in twenty minutes! Come along."

Chapter XIII

THE WARNING

Dorothy and Mr. Dixon were finishing breakfast next morning when the Boltons, father and son, dropped in.

"Good morning, stranger," was Mr. Dixon's greeting to Bill. "I understand you've been to Europe and back a couple of times since we saw you last. We've missed you, boy."

"Thanks," returned Bill. "I'm glad to be home again."

"Which home?" asked his father with an amused smile. "When in New Canaan you seem to spend most of your time across the way here."

"And why not?" protested Mr. Dixon. "Dorothy and I return the compliment often enough. Since you people moved here two lonely widowers have acquired another child apiece. It's fine—both Dorothy and I are the happier for it."

"And that goes two ways," asserted Bill. "How about it, Dad?"

"Yes, of course," Mr. Bolton assented heartily. "The intimacy is one I enjoy immensely. But I'm afraid that Bill has begun the habit of leading Dorothy into all kinds of dangerous adventures. This diamond smuggling business, for instance."

Mr. Dixon chuckled. "If you ask me, I don't think Dorothy needs any leading."

"Well, I should say not!" exclaimed his daughter. "If it weren't for Bill, I'd never be able to get out of half the messes we drift into together!"

Mr. Dixon pushed his chair back from the breakfast table. "This meeting of the mutual admiration society is all very nice," he announced with a twinkle in his eye, "But it is high time the ways and means committee got together on this last Bolton-Dixon hair-raiser. I vote we adjourn to the porch and learn what the sub-committee on the smugglers' notebook has to report."

"Second the motion," chirped Dorothy. "I'm just crazy to hear what you've found

out, Daddy Bolton. I suppose Bill has been hitting the hay, like me?"

"He put in nearly sixteen hours of uninterrupted slumber," Mr. Bolton answered as they found chairs for themselves on the shaded porch, where the air was sweet with the scent of honeysuckle.

"Well, I guess it was a dead heat," she laughed. "I woke up less than an hour ago, myself."

Mr. Dixon passed his case to Mr. Bolton and when their after-breakfast cigars were well alight, Bill produced the notebook.

"While you're busy with that stogie, Dad, I'll start the ball rolling."

"Humph! That—er—stogie happens to be a fifty-cent Corona!" snorted Mr. Dixon who was touchy about his smokes.

"Means nothing to me," replied Bill blandly. "Don't use 'em myself and—"

"Say, will you please pipe down on cigars—" broke in Dorothy, "and get to the notebook?"

"Oh, what a pun—" groaned Bill, "you certainly—"

"Be still!" ordered his father. "She's right. Let's get down to business. Now, here's the book," he went on, opening the little volume. "I dried it in our oven and although the writing is blurred, it is still quite legible. As you see, only a few pages have been used, and they show a simple set of flag signals. The red flag means: "Meet Steamship." The yellow flag stands for "A.M."; the white, "P.M." Then there are twenty-four flags to designate the hours and half-hours from one to twelve."

"Is that all?" asked Dorothy, disappointedly.

"Absolutely. The rest of the pages are blank."

"I remember hearing the men speak of the bosses' red flag when I was listening outside the cottage," she said slowly, "and that meant, of course, that Donovan and Charlie were to meet the steamer."

"Quite. But until we are able to locate the spot where these signals are displayed we won't accomplish much."

Bill nodded. "And now that they know we have discovered their method of smug-

gling, they'll probably shift their operations from Fire Island Lightship to some other point along the coast."

"Very likely," his father acquiesced. "Although it is my opinion they will discontinue, temporarily, and lay low for a while."

"Still there must be other shipments in transit right now," suggested Mr. Dixon. "But I suppose they could manage that by sending radios in code?"

Mr. Bolton carefully knocked the ash from his cigar.

"I think that's beyond the point," he argued. "We can only surmise what they may or may not do. The government men will watch the ships and the coast. Both Bill and I talked to Washington over the phone just before we came over here. And the officials there believe that the bearded aviator's plane is a most important factor in the operations of the smugglers. And the Chief wants Bill to find that plane—"

Dorothy snorted derisively. "Well, he doesn't want much! That airplane won't fly over the Beach Club again, after this—"

Mr. Bolton smiled at Dorothy's vehemence. "But you see, my dear, the Washington gentleman thinks that if Bill is able to follow the mysterious amphibian, it will eventually lead him to the headquarters of the gang."

Bill burst out laughing. "It's just like telling me to take a handful of salt—and if I can put it on the birdie's tail, I will eventually catch the birdie! But it isn't really the Chief's order, he knows what we're up against. It's that assistant of his who wants to cover himself with glory. I asked him if I hadn't better disguise my plane like a string of white boxes so they'd take me for a diamond necklace!"

"What'd he say?" giggled Dorothy.

"Oh, he spread on the soft soap until I got even more disgusted and turned him over to Dad!"

Mr. Dixon chuckled. "It's a pretty large order. I don't suppose your secret service friend gave you any valuable suggestions?"

"He did not," sneered Bill. "That, as he explained, was entirely up to me!"

For several minutes no one spoke.

"We sure are up against it," sighed Dorothy at last.

"You mean I am," was Bill's reply. "The only thing I can do is to start a series of patrols."

"*We* will start a series of patrols," she corrected. "Two planes will be better than one."

"Just as you say." Bill showed no enthusiasm. "My idea of something uninteresting to do is to fly around all day, hunting another plane, that's probably safely housed in its hangar all the time."

"Oh, don't be such a wet blanket! If none of us have brains enough to think of a plan to trap that fellow, there's no use grouching over it!"

"That's all very well. But where are we going to patrol? You told me, I think, that those lads planned to take you from the warehouse to their headquarters in Connecticut. This state's not so big when you compare it with Texas or California—but when it comes to locating a single plane—"

"Listen!" cried Dorothy and ran to the porch steps. "Come here—all of you—quick!"

The deep drone of an airplane increased to a giant roar as a smart two-seater swept down toward the house.

"It's the *Mystery Plane!*" she shrieked. "The nerve of him!"

On came the amphibian with throttle wide open, just topping the trees at the edge of the lawn. Then the four on the steps saw the pilot drop something overside and zoom upward missing the roof of the house by inches.

"I should say he has nerve—" Mr. Dixon pointed out on to the lawn. "Run out and get that parcel he dropped on the grass, Bill. This business is getting more interesting by the minute!"

Bill brought the package back to the porch.

"Oh, what do you think it is?" Dorothy grabbed Bill's arm in her excitement.

"Calm down!" said her father, as Bill held out a small box covered with brown paper and sealed with dabs of red wax.

"Handle it carefully—there may be explosive in it."

"I don't think so—" said Bill, "those things generally run by clockwork. There's no tick in this box."

"Come on—let's open it," exclaimed Dorothy impatiently. I'll bet it's nothing dangerous. Couldn't have been dropped from a plane without going off!"

"Wait one minute," commanded her father. "We'll be on the safe side, anyway. Don't touch the thing till I come back."

He ran into the house.

"Any address on it?" inquired Dorothy.

"Not the slightest bit of writing. If there is any, it's underneath this outside wrapping."

Mr. Dixon came out of the house carrying a pail of water, which he brought down to the lawn, where they were waiting.

"Drop that package into the water," he ordered Bill. "A good soaking will take the sting out of any explosive."

Dorothy burst out laughing.

"Maybe—but not in this case, Dad. Look, the thing floats!"

She snatched up the package and ripped off the outside paper, disclosing a white cork box, similar to those used for carrying the contraband.

Bill took a knife from his pocket and opened a blade that proved to be a small screwdriver. He took the box from Dorothy and removed the screws from the lid.

"Gee, do you think they've sent us a diamond?" she asked jokingly.

"Not a chance. This is a message of some kind, I'll bet!"

The box was filled with jeweler's cotton, from the center of which he drew a revolver cartridge. Around it, fastened by a rubber band, there was a small sheet of note paper. The others gathered close as he smoothed out the paper.

Blocked in capitals with a red crayon was the smugglers' message.

"LAY OFF! THIS MEANS BOTH OF YOU."

"Aha! And if we don't lay off, we'll be plunked with a bullet from a cartridge like

this!" Dorothy summed up. "This affair is likely to get exciting before we finish it."

Mr. Bolton studied the paper then returned it to the box with the cartridge.

"Has it struck you oddly," he said quietly, "that these people should know that Bill was mixed up in this? That message, of course, is for Dorothy and Bill."

"Yes, I was thinking of that," admitted Bill.

"Strange—" cogitated Mr. Dixon. "You two flew from Babylon back here without a stop—and you both went straight to bed. Neither you, nor I, Bolton, have spoken to anyone about their exploits, I'm sure."

"Somebody must have found out from the servants that our offspring flew back together," his friend decided. "It could not have happened any other way. Then that fact, added to the glimpse they must have caught of a young man in the *Mary Jane* with Dorothy, when they rammed the smugglers' motor sailor off the lightship, gave them a simple line of reasoning. And the joke of the matter is that their

warning has done just the reverse from what they figured it would do!"

Mr. Dixon looked puzzled.

"I don't quite see what you mean?"

"Why, it has given us the only real clue we have to the gang's whereabouts," smiled Bolton senior.

"Dad's one up on me, too," grinned Bill. "How about you, Dot?"

Miss Dixon stamped her foot. "You'll *dot*, and carry one you'll remember for the rest of your life if you murder my perfectly decent name that way, Bill! You ought to know by now that I won't stand for it."

"So sorry, Dorothy!" he apologized with mock politeness. "Will Miss Sherlock Holmes, the famous lady sleuthhound who solved the New Canaan Bank mystery, deign to say whether or not she also spots a clue in the villain's message?"

"Aren't you the bunk! Yes, I think I know what Daddy Bolton is talking about."

"Well, Miss Cleverness, what is it then?"

"Oh, you make me tired! But just to

prove that I'm not as dumb as you act, the clue is this—"

"Give me a chance," begged Mr. Dixon, entering into the spirit of the game. "Your idea, Bolton, is to find out from the servants who they've been talking to and trace the smugglers from—"

"Cold as an iceberg," broke in Mr. Bolton. "I'm sorry to admit it, but you and Bill don't seem very quick on the uptake this morning. What do I mean, Dorothy?"

Dorothy made a face at Bill.

"We know that these men have headquarters somewhere in this state," she began airily. "Why? Because Donovan said they must get me over to Connecticut. And later, in the warehouse, he told Peters not to rob me because the boss wanted me delivered just as I was. Daddy Bolton believes that because these men have spotted so quickly that *you* are mixed up in it, Bill, their headquarters are much nearer to this house than we figured: that the chances are, it is only a very few miles from here that they're to be found—or their system of

spying on us couldn't be so perfect!"

"That's right," concurred Mr. Bolton. "This smuggler boss or his accomplices over here must live in the neighborhood. Some of his servants know ours—have known them for some time or they would not have been able to ask questions without causing suspicion."

Mr. Dixon looked suddenly serious. "You can't mean that our neighbors along this ridge are mixed up in it? The Clarks, old Holloway, the Denbys, Miss Cross—and ten or a dozen others—are all old friends and eminently respectable people! Why, it's preposterous to think—"

"I'm not trying to pin it on anybody yet," countered Bill's father. "But mark my words—when this business is cleared up, you'll find that some eminently respectable New Canaan household *is* mixed up in it!"

Chapter XIV

UP AGAINST IT

It was finally decided that Dorothy and Bill should make a series of circular patrols, centering above New Canaan.

"We'll each take a plane," said Bill, "and keep each other in sight."

"What's the use of doing that?" Dorothy asked. "Why not make the patrols separately? When I come down, you go up. In that way we can stay in the air twice as long on the same amount of gas, and take a rest once in a while."

"Too risky. These smugglers are desperate. We've already thrown a good-sized monkey-wrench into the works of their organization. That *Mystery Plane* is quite likely to pack along a machine gun—and use it if the pilot finds out we're trying to follow him."

"Are we going up unarmed?"

"You are—but I'm not."

Dorothy raised her eyebrows in surprise.

"Well, that's nice of you!"

"Look here, young lady," cut in her father. "I don't know what Bill's plans are, but if you're going on these patrols, just remember that he is the captain of the outfit and must have obedience. Otherwise, I'll not consent to your going at all."

"Oh, I'll be good, Daddy. But I do think—"

"But you mustn't! Your job is to do what you're told and let your captain do the thinking."

"You see, Dorothy," explained Bill, "in order to use a gun in the air, a pilot must have training and practice. Otherwise, all you do is to draw the enemy's fire. If we meet up with this bird you'll have plenty to keep you busy—a very important part to play. But if there's any gunning to be done, I'll do it. Before we go up, I'll outline exactly what we're to do in the event we sight the gang's airplane."

Dorothy got out of her chair.

"How about getting busy, then?" she

suggested. "The longer we're up, the more we are likely to accomplish."

"Hold your horses," laughed Bill. "Don't think for a minute we're going to patrol all day long."

"Why not?"

"Waste of time."

Dorothy plumped herself down in her chair again.

"Oh, all right. Have it your way. Personally, I can't see doing a thing at all, unless one does it properly. You and your plans make me tired."

"Don't get peeved," he bantered. "These won't be endurance flights."

"They won't be anything at all unless we find that plane and you can't expect it to take the air just when you want it to!"

"Stop quarreling, children," admonished her father. "Bill knows what he is talking about."

"Well, maybe he does. He can catch the old plane by himself. I'm through."

"What you need is another nap, young lady. You're tired and cross."

"I'm not. Men always club together."

"And what can a poor girl do?" supplemented Bill with a grin.

"Stop teasing, Bill!" commanded Mr. Bolton. "Apologize to Dorothy and tell her why you mean to take short hops. I can't see the sense in such procedure myself—any more than she can. And just remember that an overdose of excitement puts anybody's nerves on edge. She's been through a lot more than you have during the last few days."

At his father's words, Bill's face wore such a look of honest contrition, that Dorothy's conscience smote her. They both began to speak at once.

"Gee, I'm sorry, Dorothy—"

"I'm an idiot, Bill—"

They burst into laughter simultaneously.

"Now we can get on with our discussion," smiled Dorothy. "Go ahead, Bill."

"Well, the smuggler's pilot has been taking most of his flights—or I ought to say, the flights we know about—during the late afternoon. I haven't the slightest glimmer why he chooses to fly at that

time. But, as I see it, if he has done it day after day in the past, the chances are he'll continue to leave his hangar at about the same time. My plan is for us to take off at about four each afternoon. We can remain in the air until six. If he comes from around here, we'd catch him shortly after he takes the air. That's how I figure it."

"Maybe you're right." Dorothy was still unconvinced. "But how about the warning we got a little while ago?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Well, we hadn't had lunch yet—he dropped the message from his plane in the morning—not during the late afternoon!"

Bill yawned unblushingly and got to his feet.

"Cuts no ice," he asserted. "That wasn't a regular hop."

"What then?" This from Mr. Dixon.

"A grandstand play, pure and simple. Those lads haven't the brains I gave them credit for, if they really think they can steer us off with tripe like that!"

Mr. Bolton ground the butt of his cigar on an ashtray, and rose.

"Perhaps that wasn't the idea," he suggested.

Three heads were turned sharply toward him.

"What do you mean, Bolton?" asked Mr. Dixon.

"A come-on," returned his neighbor.

"A come-on?" echoed Dorothy in a puzzled voice.

"Just that—nothing more nor less."

"I get you," Bill nodded. "Get us in the air, by that teaser—rely on us to go after the *Mystery Plane* as a matter of pride—and then fill us full of machine gun bullets. If they start anything like that—well—two can play the game and if that lad with the beard can't shoot any better than he handled his plane when he zoomed the house just now—it is, as the French say, 'to laugh'!"

"That's all very well," argued Mr. Dixon. "I don't mind Dorothy flying, but I do draw the line at machine guns. That's no game for girls. You keep your two feet on solid earth until this business is over, my dear."

"Oh, Daddy!" Dorothy's voice was full of disgust.

"Sorry, daughter, but I simply can't let you take the risk."

Mr. Bolton placed his hand on his friend's arm.

"You know, I don't think that Bill would have countenanced Dorothy's going on patrols with him unless he felt assured she would run no danger. How about it, son?"

"If she does get into trouble, it won't be with my consent," he smiled. "But seriously, sir," he turned to Mr. Dixon. "There will be a minimum of danger if Dorothy does as I tell her. In the first place, machine gun fire in the air is not nearly so potent as it is on terra firma. Try and hit a small object flashing by when you're traveling like a bat out of—ahem!—Harlem. Try it and see how many planes you don't hit! And in the second place, that bearded guy won't get a chance to turn his gun in her direction."

"Well, I'm no flyer and I haven't the slightest idea of the technicalities that must

arise in aerial combat work," Mr. Dixon made this statement slowly and thoughtfully, "but still—"

"Daddy, *don't* be ridic." Dorothy's tone was tolerantly amused.

"Do you really think I'm foolish, my dear child?"

"Oh, pigheaded is a better word, at times, if you insist on the truth!"

All four burst into roars of mirth.

"That's one from the shoulder, Mr. Dixon," choked Bill. "You'd better go the whole hog, now she's a licensed pilot!"

Dorothy's father shook his head in pretended sorrow. "You're all against me, that's obvious. And there's much too much pig in this conversation to suit a conservative parent." He threw an affectionate glance at Dorothy. "Ever since this tomboy daughter of mine was able to grip my finger when I leaned over her crib, she has pulled her old Dad hither and yon to suit her fancy. So I suppose I'll have to give in again—acknowledge I'm wrong, and so forth. Run along, children, and see to it your airships are in apple-pie order."

"You're a darling!" His daughter bestowed a hearty kiss upon his left ear.

"Beat it—you scamp!" Mr. Dixon's voice was gruff, though his eyes sparkled with merriment. "If you bother me much longer, it will be lunch time before I get down to the bank—and I'm likely to change my mind. Shoo!"

"Ogre—I defy you!" With a laugh, she beckoned to Bill and ran down the steps.

"Well, what shall it be?" she inquired when he joined her. "Your ship or mine, first?"

"Mine, I think. None of the three has been off the apron of the hangar since I left for Europe. Frank has been looking after them. He's a great old feller, you know. When we brought him back from New York he didn't know a fork from a gadget. Now he's chauffeur, general factotem around the house, and practical mechanic for me. He knows his job all right, but my boats will need more overhauling than yours."

"Which plane shall you use for this work?"

"The Ryan M-1, that the bank gave me after that Martinelli business. She certainly is a smart little bus—can fly rings around anything in this neck of the woods. Hello—" he broke off as they came down the drive, "somebody's had a breakdown."

Drawn up at the side of the ridge road stood a green coupe of the type motor car manufacturers advertise as "de luxe model." As they came in sight, a young man crawled out from beneath the body.

"Why, that's Mr. Tracey," said Dorothy. "Do you know him?"

"Yes, I met him at Mr. Holloway's house one night. Isn't he the old boy's secretary?"

"Yes, he is. He's quite nice. Dad sees a lot of Mr. Holloway, you know."

The secretary, tall and sleekly blond, was looking ruefully down at his grey flannel trousers, now streaked with the dirt of the roadway.

"Good morning, Miss Dorothy," he greeted, clipping his words in a precise manner. "Afraid I'm not exactly presentable." Then for the first time, he appeared

to notice Bill. "Hello, Bolton," he said affably. "You're quite a stranger around here."

"Got back a couple of days ago," returned Bill casually. "Need any help?"

"Thanks, no. Loose nut, that's all." He patted his monkey wrench with a grimy hand. "This fixed her. Doing much flying, Miss Dorothy?"

"Yes, I go up quite often. Bill taught me, you know."

"Yes, I remember. I'd like to take lessons, myself. How about giving me instruction—that is, if you're not too expensive?"

"I'm really not in the business," parried Bill. "You'd do much better at one of the schools. Glad to give you a hop, though, if you'd like to go up?"

"Thanks so much. I'll be glad to take advantage of your offer. What about this afternoon? It's a perfectly lovely day."

"Sorry, but today I'm overhauling my planes. Been away some time, you see. I'll probably take them up on tests about four. But of course I don't want the re-

sponsibility of a passenger until I know they are running O.K."

Mr. Tracey nodded and got into his car.

"I understand perfectly. Thanks for the invitation, though. I'll give you a ring later in the week and allow myself the pleasure of going up with you. Goodbye. Goodbye, Miss Dorothy."

With a wave of his hand the car moved off and Dorothy turned to Bill.

"Why did you tell him you were going to take the air about four?" she asked.

"Because if the smuggling gang know what I'm going to do it will save time if we pull off our little scrap this afternoon."

Before this admission Dorothy had looked puzzled. Now her eyebrows went up in startled astonishment.

"Good Heavens, Bill! You surely don't think that Mr. Tracey has anything to do with that! He's as prim and prissy as a pussy-cat!"

"Just my opinion. Of course he knows nothing about the diamonds. But your prissy boy friend has the reputation of being the worst gossip in New Canaan. When

he takes those gray bags of his to be cleaned, it will be all over the village that Bill Bolton is back and intends to test out his planes late this afternoon.—And that is just what I want."

"Oh, I see," Dorothy nodded thoughtfully. "But I'll tell you one thing. If we are going up today, it's high time we quit talking and got busy on the planes."

With four airplanes to groom, the next few hours proved busy ones for both Dorothy and Bill. But by four o'clock everything was ready for their flight.

"Got your instructions down pat?" he inquired as Dorothy got aboard the *Will-O'-the-Wisp*. The airplane was resting on the concrete apron of the Dixon's hangar, preparatory to the take off.

"Know them backwards," she flashed with a smile.

"Good luck, then."

"Good luck to you, Bill."

He stepped swiftly to one side as she switched on the ignition. For a moment or two he stood there watching her amphibian taxi away from the hangar, gathering

speed as it went. Then when the wheels left the ground and the big bird of wood and metal soared upward, he turned away and made off in the direction of his father's property.

As *Will-O'-the-Wisp* climbed in great widening circles, Dorothy at the controls knew she had plenty of time to gain the position agreed upon before Bill could get under way. The air was smooth and still, without the slightest breath of disturbing wind. Perfect flying weather and wonderful visibility with a clear blue horizon unmarred by the smallest shred of cloud.

The Boltons had turned the ten-acre pasture behind their house into a level flying field. The old hay barn had been enlarged, partitions removed and a concrete floor laid. It now made a large roomy hangar for their three planes.

Looking down as she kept on circling higher and higher, Dorothy saw Bill cross the ridge road and appear a moment or two later on his own flying field. She watched him hurry down to the hangar and could see Frank busy about the Ryan be-

fore its open doors. Then she saw Bill get aboard. When she looked again, his small monoplane was already in the air.

By this time the indicator on *Will-O'-the-Wisp's* altimeter marked a height of between eight and nine thousand feet. According to instructions, Dorothy leveled off and bringing right rudder and right aileron simultaneously into play, she sent the plane into a wide circular turn. Far below, the Ryan was pursuing the same tactics, so that both planes were cruising over the township of New Canaan.

Dorothy and Bill continued to maintain the same relative positions for the next fifteen or twenty minutes. Then as *Will-O'-the-Wisp* swung round toward the west, Dorothy spied a third plane, streaking toward New Canaan at an altitude of some three thousand feet.

The fact that Bill had also spotted the intruder was evident, for he began to climb.

"Bill's advertising plan worked," muttered Dorothy with satisfaction. "If that amphibian over there isn't the *Mystery Plane,* I'll eat my ailerons!"

Chapter XV

RUN TO COVER

Dorothy reached beneath her seat, brought forth a pair of field-glasses and clapped them to her goggles. Focussed through the powerful lenses, there was no mistaking the *Mystery Plane*. And although at this distance it was impossible to see the pilot's face, she could plainly distinguish the barrel of a machine gun that poked its wicked muzzle over the cockpit's cowling.

"So the bearded aviator means mischief!" She returned the glasses to their case. "That guy must be a cold-blooded dog to try anything like that over a populated township. He's likely to bite off more than he can chew if Bill and I have any luck. If he cracks up, I shan't weep."

At first sight of the smuggler's plane, she brought *Will-O'-the-Wisp* back on an even keel, but now in order to get an un-

impeded view directly below, she sent the plane into a steep bank.

Bill, in the Ryan, with an altitude of some twenty-five hundred feet and its nose slightly raised was streaking toward the smuggler.

Most air battles are fought in the higher ether, because combat flying often necessitates acrobatics and the ordinary pilot wants plenty of air below for such work. The smuggler being the aggressor in this case, naturally started to climb when he spotted the Ryan. He hoped, no doubt, not only to increase his altitude but to gain greater ascendency over Bill before diving at the monoplane with his machine gun going full blast.

It was time for Dorothy to act. As the smuggler's plane began to ascend, she sent her amphibian diving toward him at a tremendous spurt of speed. The *Mystery Plan* nosed over and dove in turn at the Ryan, some five hundred feet below.

"Ha-ha!" Dorothy shut off her motor and brought *Will-O'-the-Wisp's* nose gradually back to the horizontal. "Our scheme

worked! That bird either doesn't know his business or he's lost his nerve!"

A fighting plane attacking has as its objective a position directly behind the hostile plane at close range. A position either above or below the tail is equally good. From these positions the enemy is directly in the line of fire, and in sighting no deflection is necessary.

The smuggler's manoeuver showed Dorothy that he was a novice; for instead of going into a climbing spiral which would have eluded her dive and made it possible for him to attain a superior position over both planes, he dove at the Ryan. This might have been a proper fighting manoeuver if Bill's plane had not been nosing upward toward him; and had the Ryan not been the faster of the two.

By this blunder he put himself in the direct line of fire from Bill's machine gun. And had that young man been minded to use it the battle would have been over—almost before it started.

Seeing his mistake almost immediately, the bearded aviator broke his dive by zoom-

ing upward. Again Dorothy's plane dove for his tail and right there he made his second error.

Instead of gaining altitude and position by making an Immelman turn, which consists of a half-roll on the top of a loop, he pulled back his stick sharply, simultaneously giving the *Mystery Plane* full right rudder. The result was an abrupt stall and a fall off, and his amphibian emerged from the resultant dive headed in the direction from which he had first appeared.

Dorothy sent her bus spiralling downward, while Bill simply nosed his Ryan into a steeper climb. By the time the *Mystery Plane* levelled off from its split-S turn it had lost over a thousand feet. Granted he was headed for home, if that had been his intention; now he was placed in the worst possible situation with regard to his opponents. For instead of one, both planes had attained positions above him.

For the next few minutes the man in the smuggler's plane did his best to outmanoeuver the elusive pair whose motors roared above his head like giant bees at-

tacking an enemy. Never was he given a chance to better his position or to gain altitude. Every time he manoeuvered to place one of the planes within line of fire from his machine gun, the other would effectually block the move; the menacing plane would sheer off at a tangent and its partner, crowding down upon his tail, would hurl forth a smoke bomb. By the time he floundered through the cloud, his antagonists would be back in their relative positions, again, the one directly above his tail plane, the other slightly behind him to the right.

The bearded aviator knew that he was being outclassed at every move, that gradually they were forcing him down to a point where he must land or crash.

Both Dorothy and Bill knew exactly when the man in the plane below guessed their purpose. For with a sudden burst of speed he shot ahead, streaking in the direction of North Stamford like a ghost in torment.

"We've got every advantage but one," mused Dorothy, widening her throttle in

pursuit. "He knows where he's going—and we don't. He's up to some trick, I'll bet."

That her thoughts were prophetic was made apparent almost immediately. By shutting off his engine and by kicking his rudder alternately right and left with comparatively slow and heavy movements, the smuggler pilot sent his plane's nose swinging from side to side. This evolution, known as fish-tailing, he executed without banking or dropping the nose to a steeper angle. Its purpose is to cut down speed and to do so as rapidly as possible.

The *Mystery Plane* slowed down as though a brake had been applied, side-slipped to the left over a line of trees and leveled off above a field enclosed by a dilapidated stone fence.

"Confound!" exclaimed Dorothy, with a glance behind. He's going to land and both Bill and I have overshot the field!"

Nose depressed below level, a lively flipper turn to left brought *Will-O'-the-Wisp* sharply round facing the field again with its wings almost vertical. Immediate ap-

plication of up aileron and opposite rudder quickly brought the amphibian to an even keel once more. Then Dorothy nosed over, went into a forward slip, recovered and leveled off for a landing.

As the wheels of her plane touched the ground, she saw the Ryan come to a stop on the grass some yards to the right. Just ahead and between them was the *Mystery Plane.* It lay drunkenly over on one side, resting on its twisted landing gear and a crumpled lower wing section.

Dorothy stood up in her cockpit when *Will-O'-the-Wisp* stopped rolling and saw the smuggler-pilot vault the wall at the far corner of the field and disappear into a small wood. Bill was walking toward the disabled amphibian. She got out of her plane and hurried toward him.

"Pancaked!" she cried, pointing toward the wreck as she came within speaking distance.

"You said it—" concurred Bill. "That guy was in such a hurry he leveled off too soon. Usually I don't wish anybody hard luck but that bird is the great exception.

Too bad he didn't break a leg along with his plane. Now he's beat it and—"

"We are just about where we were before," she broke in.

"Not quite, Dorothy. The *Mystery Plane* is out of commission.—I wonder where we are?"

"Somewhere in the North Stamford hills."

"I know—but whose property are we on?"

"Haven't the least idea."

"I can't see any houses around here. Did you notice any as you came down?"

Dorothy shook her head and laughed.

"My eyes were glued on this field," she admitted. "I was too busy trying to make a landing myself to take in much of the landscape. Wait a minute, though—seems to me I caught a glimpse of the Castle just before I put *Wispy* into that reverse control turn. Yes, I'm sure of it."

"The Castle?" Bill frowned. "What in the cock-eyed world is that?"

"A castle, silly!"

"Make sense out of that, please."

"Sorry. You're usually trying to mystify me—I just thought I'd turn the tables for a change."

"Oh, I know—I'll say I'm sorry or anything else you want. Only please tell me what you're talking about."

"Well, it seems that about fifteen or sixteen years ago, somebody built a castle about two or three miles from North Stamford village. It's less than five miles from where we live. Not being up on medieval architecture I can't describe it properly, but Dad says it is the kind that German robber barons put up in the fourteenth century. Anyway, the Castle is built of stone with steep, slate roof, which spouts pointed turrets all over the place. I wouldn't be surprised if it had been built by a German—it certainly looks as Heinie as sauerkraut!"

"Who lives there?" asked Bill.

"Nobody, now. During the war, Dad told me, the place was suspected to be a spy-hang-out or something like that. Anyway, there was a lot of talk about it. What became of the owner, whoever he is, I don't

know. The place has been rented several times during the past few years. It is quite near the road. I drove past it just the other day on my way to and from Nance Wilkins' tea and the old dump looked quite empty and forlorn."

"Well, that's that," said Bill. "This bearded guy may have been heading for your Castle, but I doubt it. Fact is, he probably decided to land at the first convenient place when he found we were too much for him, and decided to trust to his legs for a getaway."

Dorothy had been swinging her helmet by its chin strap in an absent-minded manner. Now she raised her eyes to his.

"What are we going to do about it?" she inquired. "We can't try to break into the Castle in broad daylight."

"Hardly. And after our experience with the bank gang, we'll do no more snooping around strange houses on our own. I am going over to that little wood where our friend ran to cover. Maybe I can find some trace of him. You stay here with the planes."

"Why can't I go with you, Bill?"

"Because that smuggler may simply be hiding in the woods in hopes that we'll come after him and that we'll leave these airbuses unguarded. Then when we're gone, he'll come back here, grab one of them and fly quietly home."

"All right. I see."

"Have you got a gun?"

"That small Colt you gave me is in *Wispy's* cockpit."

"Get it and keep it on you—and if that guy shows up, don't be afraid to use it."

Dorothy shook her head. "I never shot at anybody in my life—"

Don't shoot *at* him—*shoot* him. You might have to, you know."

"But surely, Bill—"

"Oh, I don't mean for you to kill the guy. Plunk him in the leg—disable him. If you have any qualms about it, just remember that machine gun in his bus here. The man is as deadly as a copperhead and twice as treacherous. Look out for him."

"I will. But su-suppose you get into trouble, Bill. How long do you want me

to wait here before I come after you?"

"My dear girl," Bill was becoming impatient. "I'm just going to try to find out where that lad is headed. I won't be gone more than ten or fifteen minutes."

"Yes. But suppose you *don't* come back here!"

"Wait for half an hour. Then fly back home and tell Dad what has happened. He'll know what to do. Don't get nervous —I'll be all right. So long. See you in a few minutes."

With a wave of his hand, he ran across the field and Dorothy saw him hurdle the low wall and disappear between the trees of the wood where the bearded aviator had run to cover.

Chapter XVI

THE TUNNEL

Dorothy walked slowly back to *Will-O'-the-Wisp* and climbed into the cockpit. From the pilot's seat she had an unobstructed view of the field and the two other airplanes. Overhead, fluffy wind clouds began to appear from out of the northwest. Near the stone wall, three small rabbits sported in the sunshine; and presently a groundhog waddled across the field.

She glanced at her watch. The hands marked five past five. Bill had been gone twenty minutes.

"And he told me not to get nervous," she thought indignantly. "This waiting around is enough to set anybody off—I'll give him just ten minutes more!"

Dorothy counted those ten minutes quite the longest she had ever experienced. Fifteen minutes past five and still no Bill. He had told her to wait half an hour and then

to fly home for help! But she was not the sort of girl who permits herself to be quietly wiped off the picture by an order from a boy friend! She just wasn't made that way. Bill might be worried about the safety of the planes; it was his safety that worried her.

Determinedly she transferred the small revolver from its holster to a pocket of the jodhpurs she was wearing. Should she pack a flash light, too? No need of that, she decided. Figuring on daylight saving time, it wouldn't be dark until after eight o'clock. Without more ado, she got out of the plane and crossed the field toward the wood.

After she had climbed the wall at the spot where she had seen Bill disappear on the trail of the bearded aviator, she came upon a path. Narrow it was, and overgrown, yet certainly a path, leading through the trees at a diagonal from the stone fence. Without hesitation, Dorothy followed it.

She was soon certain that her idea of the wood from the air was correct, and that it

covered no great acreage. Hurrying along the winding footpath, she began to catch glimpses of blue sky between the tree trunks, and less than three hundred yards from the wall she came into the open.

The trees ended at the edge of a broad gully, apparently the bed of a shallow stream in the spring or after a shower; but now, except for a puddle or two, it was dry. On the farther side, cows were grazing in a meadow.

"Nice pastoral landscape," she said aloud. "Doesn't look like much of a spot for mischief—"

In spite of her bravado, Dorothy felt a lump in her throat. If Bill were missing, too, and she could not find him. . . .

The pasture sloped gently upward over a hill, perhaps a quarter of a mile away. And on the horizon above the hilltop, the Castle reared its pointed turrets skyward. For a little while she watched the huge, grey pile of stone, whose narrow leaded windows reflecting the late afternoon sun, winked at her with many mocking eyes. What a dreary-looking place it was, she

thought. Ugly and forbidding, it was entirely out of place in this New England countryside. The Castle seemed utterly deserted. It probably was. At least the path ended at the gully; there was no sign of it across the meadow.

Where was the bearded aviator—and above all, where was Bill?

"Bill distinctly said he would not snoop around the Castle," she thought. "I wonder if he really came this far?"

So eager had she been to reach the edge of the wood that she had paid very little attention to the ground she was covering. As this new thought struck her, she turned and gazed back over the way she had come. There were her own footprints clearly defined in the damp earth—but there was no sign that either Bill or the smuggler had passed that way.

Back along the path she trudged, walking slowly this time.

"I'm a pretty poor woodsman," she told herself. "They must have turned off somewhere."

Her eyes searched the soft earth of the

narrow trail and the thick bushes through which it wandered. But it was not until she had gone half way back to the stone wall that she discovered traces of foot-prints. And where the prints left the path, a ragged remnant of a handkerchief swung from a twig near the ground.

"There!" she pounced upon it joyfully. "How could I have been so stupid as to miss it—I might have known!"

The initials, "W. B." embroidered in one corner of the dirty fragment of linen banished any doubt she may have had as to its ownership. Leaving it tied to the bush, she struck into the wood.

Now that she was intent upon her stalking, there was no mistaking the trail left by the other two. A broken twig, heel marks on the soft mold, a trampled patch of moss; all these signs bespoke a hasty passage through the brush.

She had not gone far, when suddenly in a clearing she came upon the end of the trail. The earth here was bare of undergrowth and sloped sharply down into a marshy ravine. In the center of the little

clearing a pile of brush was heaped with dead grass and rubbish,—tin cans, old shoes, automobile fenders, rusty bedsprings, boxes and weathered newspapers.

For a moment Dorothy stared at the rubbish dump. Then she noticed footprints circling the heap and followed them down to the ravine. Here, as if to bulwark the miscellaneous junk and to keep it from sliding, was a buttress of boxes and barrels.

Dorothy got down on her knees and examined these carefully. At the very bottom, almost on a level with the tussocky surface of the marsh, a barrel lay on its side, its depth leading inward. A sudden inspiration made her pull a long stick from the pile and run it into the barrel. She gave a little gurgle of astonishment. The barrel had no bottom.

Still on her knees she peered inside. Just beyond the rim lay a scrap of paper. She picked it up and scrawled upon it were the words "This way" . . .

"Another message!" she whispered jubilantly.

She tried to move the barrel but found that it was securely nailed to the bulwark of packing-cases. The soft earth about its mouth was heavily marked with footprints.

"Well, there's no doubt about it now—'this way'—" she murmured and without further waste of time wormed her way into the barrel.

As she crawled through the other end, she found herself in a narrow tunnel. The daylight appearing through its ingenious entrance was strong enough to show her that the rubbish had been built over a frame of two-by-fours and chickenwire, which formed the roof and sides of the tunnel under the dump.

Dorothy got to her feet. A short distance ahead the tunnel led straight into the high ground over which she had come from the wood path. Here the sides were timbered with stout posts, and ceiled with cross beams to prevent the earthen roof from falling.

"Gee, if this isn't like Alice in Wonderland! Why, I might meet the White Rabbit any minute now." She giggled, then

shivered as she remembered why she was there.

For a moment she considered returning to the plane for her flash light, but decided it would take too much precious time, and passed on cautiously, stopping now and then to listen. She could hear nothing but the squashy sound of her footsteps on the marshy floor of the tunnel.

After proceeding about fifteen feet, the dark passage turned slightly in its course. Just beyond the turn, as Dorothy was groping to find which way it led, her hands touched a wooden surface. This proved to be a heavy door, standing partly open. As she shoved it back with her shoulder, she tripped over a heavy object which lay across the sill. Dorothy reached down in the darkness and picked up a crowbar.

She advanced, dragging the crowbar after her. The floor of the passage at this point began to slope up hill. But after a few paces ahead, she found it went abruptly downward at a considerable angle, took a sharp turn to the right, then began to slope gently upward again.

By this time she had lost all sense of direction. She progressed slowly, feeling along the wall with her left hand, resting it on one timber until she had advanced half way to where she supposed the next would be. In this manner she crept on for nearly a quarter of a mile without meeting any obstruction. The air, though cold and lifeless, was breathable; but the darkness and the horrid feeling of being shut in began to get on her nerves. Once more she stopped to listen. Absolute stillness. Dorothy could hear nothing but the beating of her heart as she strained her eyes to pierce the black passage. She seemed completely shut off from everything on earth.

Feeling that inaction was even more unbearable than running head-on into danger, she recommenced her slow advance. Presently, she came to a place where the tunnel widened out. Here, even with outstretched arms, she could not reach both walls at once.

As she swung to follow the left hand wall, her right arm struck a free timber which seemed to have no connection with

either side of the passage. From this she deduced that she was now in a sort of subterranean chamber, and that this free post was one of the supports of its roof. Continuing along the left wall, with her right arm outstretched, she soon reached another post. The heavy crowbar which she was endeavoring to carry at arm's length, struck against the base of the upright and made a loud, cavernous sound.

"Bloomp!"

Dorothy was prepared for the next timber, some three feet farther on. She took the crowbar in her left hand and extended her right to grasp the post, with the intention to discover the size of the chamber.

Suddenly she recoiled in horror. She could feel a chill rush up and down her spine. For she had touched, not the splintered wood of the post, but, unmistakably, human flesh.

Dodging quickly to one side, she dropped the crowbar and drew her revolver. Holding it straight before her, ready to fire at the first sign of a hostile advance, she listened breathlessly.

To her amazement, there was no sound; not the slightest indication of movement in the awful darkness. She supposed the enemy must be maneuvering to take her from some unexpected quarter. But she could not understand how it could be managed in that inky blackness without giving her some audible sign.

Feeling that she must have something firmer than mere space behind her, Dorothy retreated, keeping her pistol leveled. With her left hand she groped behind her and when she felt the solid timber, she leaned back against it, waiting.

Seconds dragged like hours and still there was no sound. Gradually, Dorothy's nerves were beginning to quiet down.

"Well, this is darned queer," she thought, "maybe that person is making tracks out of here. I can't just stand still and do nothing, anyway."

She began to move forward very cautiously. When she had covered ten short paces, she stopped and listened again. Absolute stillness everywhere, stillness pervaded by the strange, dank smell of un-

sunned earth and the musty rot of roots and wood.

But this time Dorothy fancied she could hear a faint, very faint sound of breathing. At first she thought it was her own, reechoing from the walls of the dark cavern. Then she held her breath and listened once more. *There* was some one else in this subterranean chamber.

"Well, here goes," she said with closed lips. "It's now or never. I can't stand this much longer!"

But she had only taken a single step when the same chill of horror and fright raced over her again. Her revolver muzzle had touched something apparently alive and yielding, the clothed body of someone who stood motionless as before.

"Hold it! hold it!" she cried, her teeth chattering. "Don't move or I'll plug you!"

With her gun firmly pressed against the body, she raised her other arm to ward off any blow that might be directed against her. As she did so, it became evident that the body still had not moved, that the breath was coming regularly and faintly, but

there was no stir of limbs, no shift of muscle or of weight.

Such mysterious behavior filled Dorothy with terror. She bit her lips and dug the mouth of her Colt forward into the body.

"Stick 'em up—do you hear? Over your head!" she said viciously between her teeth.

The figure remained motionless and as silent as before. Dorothy felt her heart beats mount to a violent thunder. She felt she could stand the strain no longer.

Still holding her pistol against the flesh of this mysterious being, she lowered her arm from her forehead and reached slowly forward. She touched something. Her whole body was convulsed with horror, anguish and surprise.

Her trembling fingers had descended upon the smooth, cool softness of a leather helmet. They slipped, cold and damp, from the helmet to the face and over the warm cheek.

In that moment everything was changed. Now Dorothy understood why the figure

was motionless and quiet. She touched a fold of cloth that bound the mouth and slipping her hand to the shoulder, she felt a twist of thin rope.

She slipped the pistol into her belt without hesitation. Bill always carried several packets of matches in his pockets. She found one and struck a light.

When the little puff of smoke and the obscuring haze of the first flash settled down to a fitful flame, Dorothy got a glimpse of her friend. He was gagged and bound to one of the upright supports. His eyes were closed and his head drooped to one side.

In less than a second Dorothy had flung away the match and was cutting the young fellow's bonds with her knife, groping for them in the dark and supporting his released body against her own as she worked. At last she was able to lift him out of the loosened loop that had held his feet and stepping back, laid him on the earthen floor.

Then she knelt beside him, rubbing his wrists and cheeks with her grimy palms.

For some minutes her ministrations seemed of no avail. But presently, under her fingers she felt his head move. At first she could only catch groans and sighs. Then, as consciousness began to assert itself, Bill raised his head a little and said faintly:

"Who's that?"

"It's me—Dorothy."

She lifted his head into her lap. As she did so Bill gave a start and struggled feebly.

"Let me go!" he muttered. "Let me alone!"

"Just keep quiet, Bill," she soothed. "You'll be better soon."

Bill lay back in her arms and was still.

"Who are you?" he asked again and this time in a firmer voice.

"It's Dorothy, your pardner!"

"Dorothy? Thank Heaven for that." He caught at her hand and squeezed it. "We're in the tunnel, aren't we?"

"Yes—where it widens out into a kind of room."

"I remember now—that guy slugged me when I was making for the candle on the table over there."

"Who slugged you? The bearded aviator?"

"That's right. I was coming along, lighting matches to see by when he stepped from behind one of the uprights—and that's all I remember. Knocked me out, I guess."

"He certainly did! You've a bump on your head like an egg. The helmet probably saved your life. Feel pretty rotten, don't you?"

"You said it! Dizzy as blazes—and my head's as sore as a boil. But I guess I'll be all right in a minute if I can just lie still. Do you mind?"

"Of course not, silly. Take your time. I suppose you followed the footprints to the barrel, like I did."

"Yep. But how come you went after me?" he chuckled. "I thought the idea was to beat it home in the plane."

"Oh, Bill, I just couldn't!"

Bill sat up. "Well, I suppose I was crazy to ever think you would—but I honestly didn't think I'd get into such close quarters with that fellow. As it is, I'm

mighty glad you didn't take my fool suggestion," he admitted. "Where would I be now, if you hadn't shown up? By the taste in my mouth and the feel of my wrists, that galoot must have tied me up and gagged me!"

"He did that. You were bound to an upright. Have you any idea where this tunnel comes out?"

"Ten dollars to counterfeit two-cent piece, your Castle is the answer to that question," he said, and lit a match. "Oh, there's the table, Dorothy. Do you mind lighting that candle? I'm too dizzy to stand up yet or—"

He stopped short and Dorothy saw his eyes widen in startled surprise.

"Look out!" he yelled and the match went out.

Dorothy felt a hand grip the back of her neck and immediately afterward its fellow clutched her throat. In a fierce frenzy of terror, she shot to her feet, gasping and choking and flinging her arms wildly backwards as she rose.

Chapter XVII

"THE TOMBS"

Dorothy's vigorous motion forced her assailant to relax his grip upon her throat, and as she felt his weight upon her shoulders, she lunged down and backward. There was a dull, cracking thud, and the sound of a body falling. The back of her head struck one of the timbers that supported the ceiling of the tunnel. The place seemed to whirl round and round and glittering sparks danced before her eyes. When this sensation ceased, Dorothy leaned back against the post into which she had flung herself in her apparently successful effort to shake off her opponent.

With the realization that the attack had halted and that her assailant had either made his escape or was incapacitated, she fumbled in her pocket for a match.

"Where are you, Dorothy?" Bill's voice called from the dark void.

"Right here, old thing—by the wall."

She struck a light.

"All right?"

He looked pale and shaken in the flicker of the tiny flame. She saw that he grasped the crowbar.

"A bit woozy," she replied, and lit the candle on the table. "Cracked my head on a beam or something."

"That bearded guy didn't hurt you?"

"He didn't get a chance. Which way do you think he went?"

Bill laughed softly. "You put him out of business. Look!"

He pointed toward an upright and Dorothy saw a crumpled figure lying huddled at the base of the post.

"Goodness! You don't think I've finished him?" she breathed in horrified alarm.

"No such luck," he affirmed callously and bent over the man's body. "Sit down until you feel better. This chap is only stunned. I'll take care of him."

Dorothy stumbled over to the table. Near-by was a chair. She dropped into it.

"He bumped his skull on this post," Bill went on. "No great damage, I guess. Funny—whenever there's a rough-house in the dark, somebody invariably gets a broken head. The three of us are even now."

"What are you going to do with him?" Her dizziness was passing.

"Oh, I'll give him as good as he gave me, and lash him to this upright."

He busied himself tying up the unconscious smuggler. When he had finished, he looked up and beckoned to Dorothy.

"Come over here. He's plenty secure now. This rope held me, I guess it'll hold him."

"What are you going to do now?"

"Find out who this chap really is."

His fingers peeled off the false beard and Dorothy cried out in astonishment.

"Mr. Tracey!" she gasped.

"It's Tracey, all right!"

"But who'd have thought that sleek pussy cat was mixed up in this? Aren't you surprised, Bill?"

"Not very. When his car had the break-

down this morning I began to suspect. The whole thing was too darn opportune. He was part of their system of watchers, of course. Probably wanted to find out how we'd taken their warning."

"But surely Mr. Holloway can have nothing to do with it! He's such a sweet old man."

Billy transferred two revolvers from Tracey's belt to his own.

"If you want my candid opinion," he said, "Old Holloway is the leader and brains of the gang. Only it's going to be the dickens and all to prove it in a court of law."

Dorothy stared at him incredulously. "Why, Bill—are you *sure?*"

"Why not? He's just a double-dealer, that's all. That wise old bird is certain to have a flock of cast iron alibis up his sleeve. He must have made more than enough money out of this diamond smuggling to keep Tracey's mouth shut—and the mouths of any others who may be corralled."

"I've got a hunch," said Dorothy.

"Let's have it."

"Not yet. I want to chew it over a bit. Let's go back now and get help."

"That's for you to do. I'm going on to the Castle and surprise whoever's there. I don't think they have a suspicion of what has happened down here. Tracey never got that far, I'm sure of it."

"Well, you can take it from me that you're not going alone. I'm coming with you."

Bill hesitated.

"Well, perhaps that's the best way, after all," he admitted at last. "It will take some time to get the proper people over here—and by then somebody in the Castle might spot the crumpled plane and start to investigate. Time's more than money now—let's go."

"But do you think you can make it?"

"Can do," he said grimly. "I've got a sweet headache, but it might be worse. How about you?"

"Ditto," she smiled. "Are you going to drag that heavy crowbar?"

"Think it might be wise. Lucky I

found it by that camouflaged dump. I had to bash the lock of the door to the main tunnel with it. And there may be another door farther along."

"Then I'll take the candle," she said. With the light held well over her head, she followed him out of the chamber.

The tunnel from here on was concreted, walls, roof and floor. Passing quickly along for possibly a hundred yards, they approached a steep flight of steps. At the top they found a closed door. Bill turned the handle and it swung inward.

"Guess I won't need this any more," he said and braced the door open with the crowbar. "If they're too many for us, we may have to leave in a hurry. Just as well to keep the way clear."

By the feeble light of the candle they saw that they stood in a small whitewashed cellar. Leading off this to the left, was an open corridor, and from some distance down this passage came the glow of electric light. A large safe, painted white, was built into a corner of the cellar wall.

At a nod from Bill, Dorothy blew out

the light and placed the candlestick on the stone floor. Then as she straightened up he brought his lips close to her ear.

"I'll bet that's where they keep the loot! Follow me, and hold your gun handy."

One after the other, on tiptoe, the pair crept across the cellar, their rubber-soled shoes making not the slightest sound. When they came to the corridor, Bill slackened his pace but continued to stalk steadily forward. On their left the whitewashed wall led straight on in an unbroken line. In the right wall, they saw the iron grills of cells. They passed the first, which was dark, and evidently empty. From the second came the glow of light.

Bill turned and placed a finger on his lips. Then he got down on his hands and knees and crawled forward to the door.

"Good heavens!" Dorothy heard him gasp. "So that's where they had you!"

He stood up and she hurried toward him.

"Terry!"

Her cry was one of absolute amazement. Through the grating she saw her long lost friend, starting up from his cot where he

had been reading when Bill's exclamation caused him to look around. Terry advanced to the door and greeted them.

"Well, by all that's wonderful! Dorothy! Bill Bolton! What—"

"Are you all right? You're not hurt or anything?" Dorothy's excited whisper broke in upon his incoherent surprise.

"No, I'm safe and sound, except that I'm pretty tired of reading—cooped up in this hole. But say, how did you two manage to get down here?"

"Through the tunnel," replied Bill with a grin.

"Gee, is there a tunnel, too? Never heard of it. How about that lad Peters and the others—you didn't see them?"

"No, we came through the cellar. Have you any idea where they are?"

"Upstairs, probably—in the house—playing cards. Since Peters came here a few days ago he's been bringing me my grub. He's quite chatty; likes to boast about how he trims those others at poker."

"How many men are there altogether, do you know?" asked Dorothy.

"I've never seen more than three at a time, unless you count their be-whiskered pilot I mixed it up with at the beach club. Remember him, Dorothy? But he doesn't come around much, so Peters says. He doesn't like him—thinks he's high-hat."

"Well, he's out of the picture, now," declared Bill. "We got him in the tunnel."

"Yes—and Terry, do you know that he is Mr. Tracey?" Dorothy could not contain the exciting news any longer.

"Great grief! You don't say so! I never could stand that fellow—didn't think he had sense enough to come in out of the rain. But then, you never can tell which way a cat will jump." He stepped closer to the grill and looked anxiously from Bill to Dorothy. "Say, do you think you two could find a way of getting me out of here?"

"We left a grand crowbar in the cellar! Don't you think we could bash the lock with it, Bill?"

"Might pry it open. But I'm afraid the noise would give us away—"

"Not a chance of that—if you mean it

might disturb the poker players," Terry interrupted. "There's a perfect whale of a sound proof door at the head of the stairs. I was brought down that way. They always keep it shut."

"Good!" Bill hurried off to get the crowbar.

"What's all this about, Dorothy?" asked Terry. "All I know is that these lads held up my car the night of the Sillies. Some bird in a mask drew a gun on me—my eyes were bandaged and I was popped into another bus and brought over here. Where am I, anyway?"

"Why, you're in that old stone Castle—near North Stamford. This is a diamond smuggling gang we're up against. The local and the state police, not to mention secret service agents, have been scouring the country for you. Wait till you see the newspapers! You're nationally famous! But your mother and father and the rest of us have been terribly worried."

Terry nodded. "I've been thinking of that," he replied. "But diamond smugglers, eh! No wonder—" he whistled

softly. "You've no idea what it was like to be caged up here—thinking of the family and how terrible it was for them—not knowing why I was here, or if I'd ever be set free. Yet they've not tried any rough stuff. Gave me plenty of books and magazines, and enough decent food, thank goodness!"

Bill reappeared, carrying the bar.

"Now get back from the door, Terry," he cautioned. "I'm going to have a go at it with this."

He placed the end of the crowbar through the grating and behind the steel disk which held the lock. Then he shoved it forward and sideways until that end was jammed between the inner edge of the door and the frame.

"Lend me a hand, please, Dorothy, and we'll see what a bit of leverage will do."

Together they seized the crowbar and pulled. There was a sharp snap and the door flew open.

"Good enough!" cried Terry. He sprang into the corridor and grasped their hands.

"You said it," laughed Bill. "That's the second time this bar has come in handy since we started this job. If we ever get out of here I'm going to keep it as a souvenir."

"I'll take the diamonds," Dorothy added enthusiastically.

"What's on deck now?" inquired Terry.

Bill grew suddenly serious.

"Have you any idea where they keep themselves above?"

"It's ten to one they'll be playing poker in the kitchen. They've nothing else to do now, except to feed me—or so Peters says."

"Where's the kitchen? I mean, how do we get to it from here?"

"It's along this passage and up the staircase at the end. The door at the top—the sound proof one—opens into the kitchen."

Bill handed Terry a gun. "Don't be afraid to use it," he commanded. "They won't hesitate to shoot if they get a chance."

Terry looked at him in great disdain. "Say, just because I appear to be my cheerful self and so on, don't get the idea that

I've enjoyed this rest cure. All I've been thinking about for days—and nights too—is the chance to get even with them. Now I have it." He patted the revolver.

"O.K. then, come along, both of you."

It was but a step to the turn in the passage. Directly ahead lay a steep flight of stairs. And at the top was the silent menace of the closed door.

Chapter XVIII

THE FLAGS

"Do you think it will be unlocked?" Bill dropped his voice to a whisper. The three were standing on the landing at the head of the stairs, facing the door.

"Sure to be," returned Terry. "That is, if we can take friend Peters' word for it. He spilled all this dope when he'd had an argument with the rest of the gang."

"Then let's go—" said Bill. "You stand to one side, Dorothy."

"Shucks!" With a twist of the handle, that young lady threw the door wide and jumped into the room.

"Hands up! Stick 'em up!" she cried.

Two of the three men seated at the table complied at once with her command. Their hands shot above their heads with the rapidity of lightning. The third reached for a revolver that lay amongst the scattered cards.

"Bang!"

The man gave a cry of pain and caught at his shattered wrist with his other hand.

Startled by the sudden detonation just behind her, Dorothy almost dropped her gun.

"Dog-gone it!" Terry seemed annoyed.

"What's the matter?" Bill still covered the men.

"Matter enough! Too much rest cure, I guess. Forgot to remove the safety catch on this gat you gave me. Lucky you fired when you did."

"Well, never mind that now," Bill's words were crisp and to the point. "Grab that clothesline and tie their hands behind their backs. That's right! Dorothy, will you give first aid to that fellow's wrist? I'll see that they don't play any tricks."

After securing the men, Terry searched their clothes and produced two revolvers and a wicked looking knife. He also took a ring of keys from Peters.

"Gee!" exclaimed that gentleman. "If it ain't the girl what blame near kicked me teeth out I'll eat me bloomin' hat!"

"You'll eat skilly in Wethersfield Prison, or Atlanta, before you get through," Terry promised. "Shake a leg—both of you. Down to the cells for yours. Did you ever realize what a swell difference there is between the titles of jailer and prisoner? March!"

"Wait a minute!" Dorothy cut in. "I'll help you take this man along, too. I've done all I can for him. It's a clean hole through his wrist. Bone's broken but the bullet missed the artery. He might be worse off."

Bill spoke from the doorway that led into the rest of the house. "While you're gone I'll search this place for any other members that might otherwise be overlooked!"

After housing the smugglers in cells, Dorothy and Terry returned to the kitchen and were surprised to find Bill speaking over the telephone.

"And that's that, Dad," they heard him say. "Spread the good tidings in proper places and make it snappy, please. Bye-bye!"

He placed the receiver on its hook.

"I guess you got that," he smiled. "Dad will phone the police and Washington. Then he's driving over here with Frank. And he will also let Mr. Walters and your father know, Dorothy."

"Fine—I'm glad he thought of that!" Dorothy laughed in excited approval.

"Didn't take you long to search the place," said Terry.

"No—only a few rooms on this floor are being used. The staircase is thick with dust. Nobody up there—no footprints."

"Well, what's to do now?"

"We'll wait for Dad, of course," said Bill, "and then Dorothy and I can fly our respective planes home. How about it, pal? Feel able to do that?"

Dorothy lifted her eyebrows in derision. "Well, I should hope so! I suppose I do look pretty frazzled—but you don't seem in the best condition yourself. However—I've another plan."

"What's that?"

Terry had taken over the phone and was talking in low tones to his mother.

"Do you remember I told you I had a hunch, Bill?"

"Yes, I do. What about it?"

"We're going to follow my hunch."

"Where to?"

"Well, we'll start out of this house—by the front door this time, if you please—then across the meadow and through the wood to the field where our planes are parked."

"And—?"

"And then you're going to get into the rear cockpit of *Will-O'-the-Wisp* and take a little hop with me."

Bill looked surprised. "What about my Ryan?"

"Oh, Frank can pilot her home."

"Yes? And then where are we going?"

"That's my secret. Tell Terry, and come along now. We're in a hurry, even if you don't know it."

"Well, I'm evidently not supposed to know anything of this new mystery!"

"Don't be stuffy! Come on, now. This is serious, Bill, really. I'm not leading you on a wild goose chase, I promise you."

"Humph! It must be hot stuff—not!"

Dorothy made a face at him. "I want to tell you it's the hottest stuff of the whole business. And I just want you to be in at the finish, don't you see, stupid?"

"All right. As you insist—"

"That's right. Of course I do. And when we've done this thing up brown, I'll cart you back home to dinner—and if you are very good you can sit next to me!"

Bill grinned. "You may be New England Yankee, but that line of blarney you hand out spells Ireland in capital letters! Come on then, we'll leave Terry to guard the fort."

After they had put that young man wise to their plans, the two left the Castle. They were both pretty nearly exhausted after their experiences in the tunnel, but the success of their adventure was elating, and more than made up for its bad effects.

"Well, here's the field just where we left it," announced Bill as he helped Dorothy over the stone fence. "And there's that *Willy* plane of yours, too. Whither away?"

"Hop in and you'll see."

Five minutes later, Bill looked down from his seat in the rear cockpit and saw that she was going to land near the tennis courts in the broad parking space behind the cabanas at the beach club. The members had become used to seeing her land *Will-o-the-Wisp* on the club grounds. Their descent therefore caused little or no notice. The plane stopped rolling and a man in the club uniform of a beach attendant ran up.

"Hello, Jeffries," waved Bill. "I thought you might be here. "How are things?"

"We caught Donovan and Charlie Myers over at Babylon. But they're small fry. Anything new, Bolton?"

Bill got out of the plane and helped Dorothy to descend.

"I should say there is! Tell you about it in a minute. Dorothy, let me present Mr. Arthur Jeffries, one of the very big men of the United States Secret Service. Arthur, this is the famous Dorothy Dixon!"

Arthur Jeffries said some polite things which caused Dorothy to blush modestly,

and in a few pithy sentences Bill told the story of their afternoon.

"So you see, old man," he ended. "You won't have to wait around this club any longer disguised as a gold fish or what have you—because the bearded aviator won't fly the *Mystery Plane* over here any more—that is to say—not for twenty years or so at the soonest."

"He'll get all that or more," Jeffries commented crisply. "But the man he worked for—sunning himself over there on the sand—old Holloway, I mean—he's the nigger in the woodpile! The boss of this gang of diamond smugglers—but I can't arrest him on that evidence!"

Dorothy made an eager gesture. "Will you come with me—I want to show you two something. We'll go around the far side of that big cabana on the end of the boardwalk. We're going inside."

"Holloway's bath house?" This from Bill.

"Exactly. I don't want him to see us, though, so be careful."

The three rounded the gaily painted cot-

tage and ducking under the red and black striped awning, entered the front room which was fitted out with the usual wicker furniture and bright rugs.

"I wonder where he keeps them," Dorothy murmured to herself. "Ah—this looks like it!"

She lifted the hinged lid of a handsome sea chest and pulled forth a dozen or more colored flags.

"By jove! The goods!" cried Bill. "How did you ever guess it, Dot?"

Dorothy was so pleased by her find that she passed over his use of the despised diminutive.

"I just happened to remember that he generally decked out his cabana with a flock of these things. And though the club runs up flags on special occasions, Mr. Holloway did it nearly every afternoon. It came to me when you pulled off Tracey's beard back there in the tunnel."

"Precisely," said Arthur Jeffries. "Holloway would get word in New York at his office, probably, when a liner carrying contraband was expected off Fire Is-

land light. Then he'd come out here and signal the time to Tracey in his airplane, by means of these flags. I'll bet the old boy never went near that Castle. Some alibi! He and Tracey probably never saw each other from the time he went to the city in the morning until he came home for dinner at night."

"Are you going to arrest him now?" she asked breathlessly.

"As soon as I can get out on the beach. I'll do it as quietly as possible, of course. No use in causing a disturbance with his friends around. So long, Bill. Glad to have met you, Miss Dixon—and many thanks. See you both later on."

They left the cabana with him, but turned back toward the plane as he went down the beach.

"That ties it, I guess," she smiled.

"It certainly does!" agreed Bill.

"Now—didn't I tell you it would be hot stuff?"

He looked at her and they both burst out laughing.

"And the best of it is that the govern-

ment will probably pin a medal on you for it!" he declared.

"Oh, Bill! Do you really think that?"

Bill grinned at her excitement. "You get into that plane and take me home to dinner. That was the bargain, and I'm famished!"

"Dinner!" exclaimed Dorothy in disgust. "My word! We've caught those diamond smugglers when the whole of the secret service couldn't do it—and all you think of is food! Gee, I'm glad I'm not a mere man. Hop aboard. I'll give her the gun and fly you home to your dinner."

THE END

Those who enjoyed this story and the preceding one entitled *Dorothy Dixon Wins Her Wings* will find much to interest them in the next book of this series entitled *Dorothy Dixon Solves the Conway Case.*